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Frontier Stories

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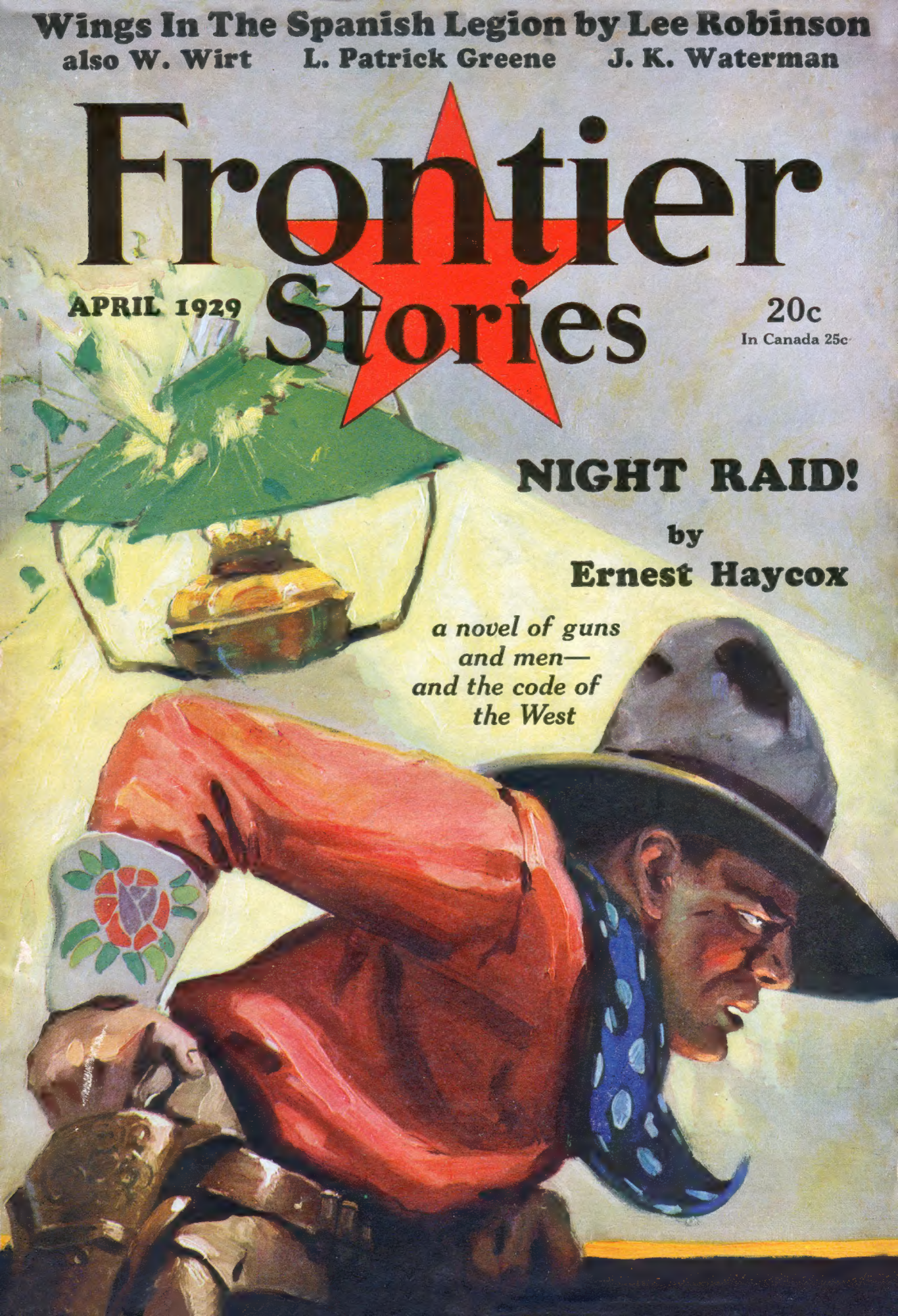
NIGHT RAID!

by

Ernest Haycox

a novel of guns and men— and the code of the West



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Kindly the water cradles you, covers you warm and deep. To you comes rest as soothing as sleep. . . .

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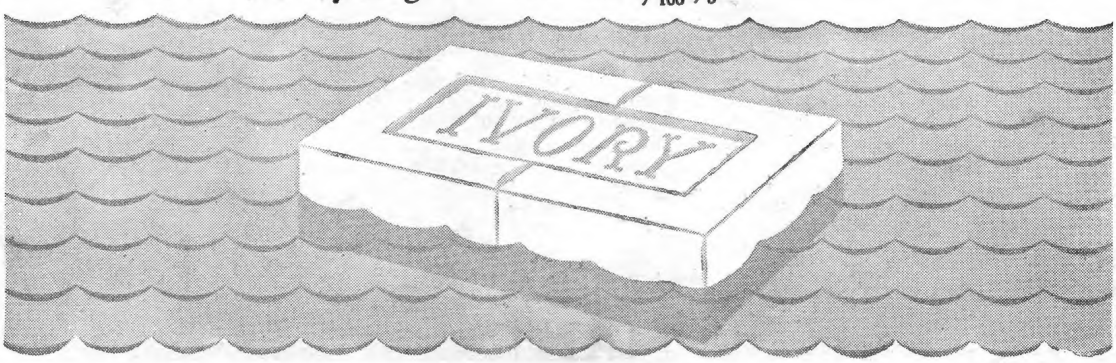

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HAVE you ever watched a magician pick wriggling rabbits out of a high hat? A wonderful trick, you say. Well, I'm a magician of a different sort—a magician that builds health and strength into your body in just 24 hours. And it is no trick. It took me 19 years of tireless planning and experimenting to be able to do it.

People call me the Muscle-Builder, because I take weak, run-down bodies and transform them into strong, virile, handsome bodies in double-quick time. *And I actually do it in 24 hours.*

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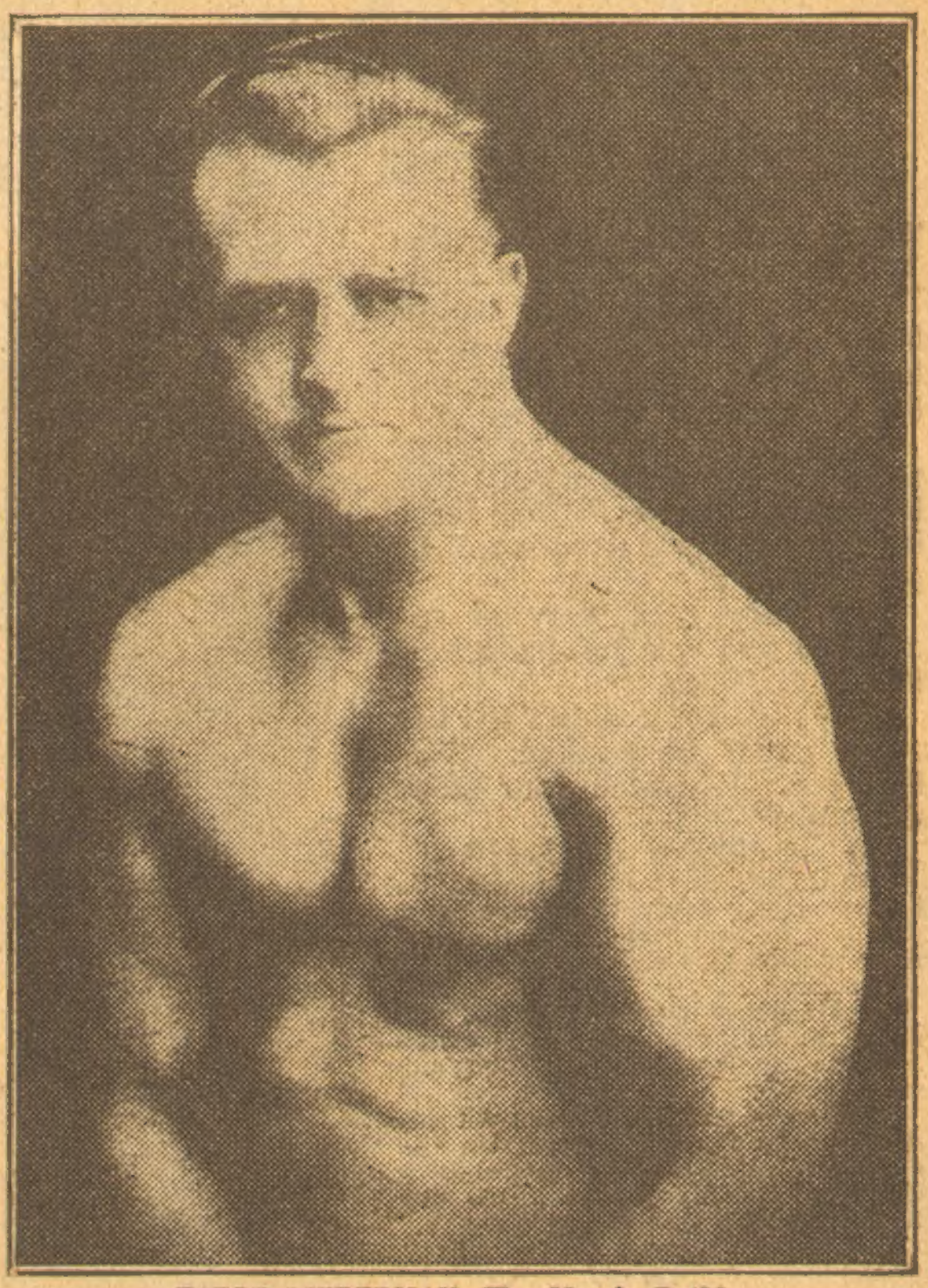
By this I do not mean that you must exercise 24 hours continuously. My scientific short-cut to healthy, handsome, broad-shouldered bodies must be taken in short 15 minute doses. Because, if you exercised more than that in my high-pressure, quick development way, you would tear down more than I can build up. So all I ask of you is 15 minutes of your spare time each day for 90 days (actually only 22½ hours' time) doing simple, easy exercises under my guidance. You can do them in the privacy of your room, if you wish, but you must do them every day to get the best results.

And What Results!

In the first 30 days I guarantee to add one whole inch of real, live muscle on each of your arms, and two whole inches of the same revitalizing strength across your chest. I'll take the kinks out of your back, strengthen and broaden your shoulders, give you a wrist of steel, and a fighting, peppy personality that just yells youth, vigor and vitality all over.



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"Don't make a monkey of yourself"

cried Bob as I sat down at the Piano

I WAS spending my vacation with Bob when I met his cousin, Helen. It was love at first sight with me. But unfortunately she didn't seem to feel the same way about it.

"You've got nothing to worry about," Bob insisted when I told him my tale of woe. "Just leave it to me. All you need is a little publicity . . ."

The very next day he announced that he'd just had a long talk with Helen.

"Boy! What I didn't tell her about you!" he exulted. "Believe me. I boosted your stock sky high!"

"What did you tell her?"

"Well, she's crazy about music. So I conveniently forgot that you can't play a note, and told her you are *an accomplished pianist!*"

"But Bob . . ."

"Not another word! I've got you sitting pretty, now. If you're asked to play—just say you've sprained your wrist."

That very night we were all invited to the Carews' party. On the way over, I sensed a big difference in Helen—a difference that made my heart beat fast with a new hope.

I Am Asked to Play the Piano

A little later in the evening we were all gathered around the piano.

"I've heard so much about your talent!" cried Helen. "Won't you play something for us?"

"Yes!" "Yes!" "Please!" came from all sides.

With a smile I bowed low . . . and replied that *it would be a pleasure!*

Bob's grin changed to amazement. Calmly ignoring his frantic signals I walked over to the piano. Quick as a flash he followed me.

"For the love of Pete get away from that piano," he whispered excitedly. "Don't make a monkey of yourself. If Helen ever hears you play she'll think everything else I told her is bunk, too!"

Turning to the guests, Bob announced, "Perhaps we should wait until some other time. His wrist was slightly sprained in tennis this afternoon and . . ."

"Oh, that's nothing!" I broke in, and without any further hesitation I began the first notes of Irving Berlin's famous "Russian Lullaby"! The tantalizing, irresistible strains seemed to throw a spell over the guests.

I forgot Bob's astonishment, forgot the glow of admiration in Helen's eyes. On and on I played—losing myself in my music—until thunderous applause shook the room.

That brought me to myself with a start. For the rest of the evening I was the lion of the party.

Bob could hardly restrain his curiosity until we were safely home.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew how to play? When did you learn?"

"You never asked whether I knew how to play," I countered.

"Of course not! Last summer you didn't know one note from another—how was I to guess you'd blossomed into an accomplished pianist overnight?"

"Not overnight, exactly!" I smiled. "Although it almost seemed that way! Remember that Free Demonstration Lesson in music I sent for last summer? Well, when it came and I saw how easy it was to learn without a teacher I sent for the complete course. It's great! Why, almost before I knew it, I was playing simple tunes! I can play *anything* now . . ."

"So you really *are* an 'accomplished' pianist! The joke's on me, all right!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say accomplished,'" I laughed. "But enough of a pianist to get a lot more fun out of life than I used to!"

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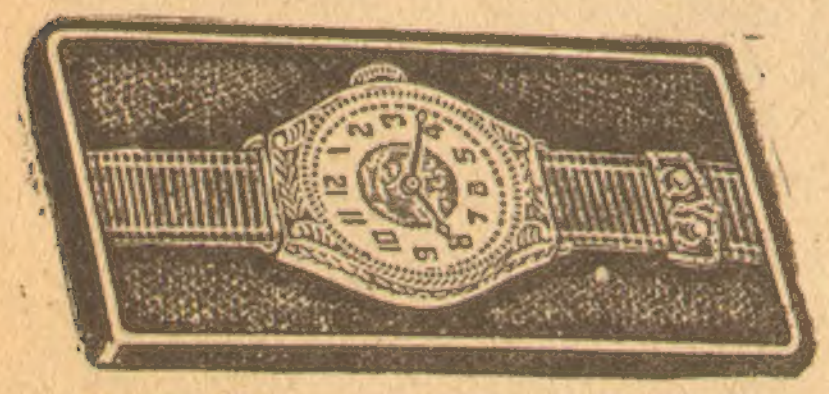

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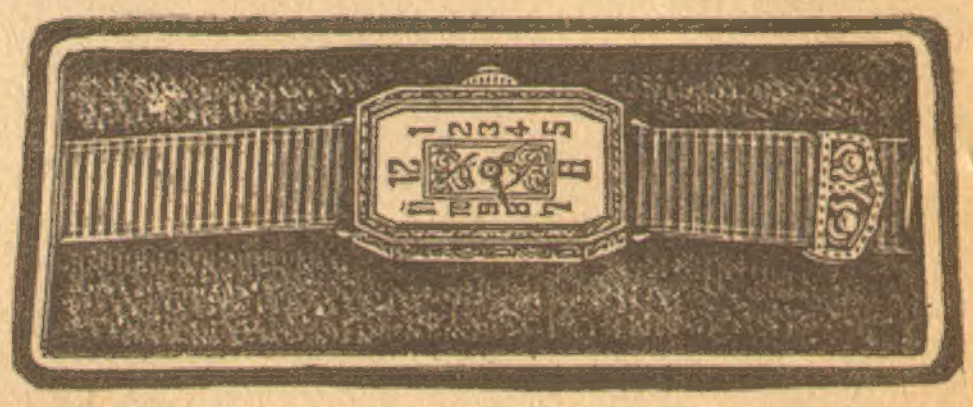

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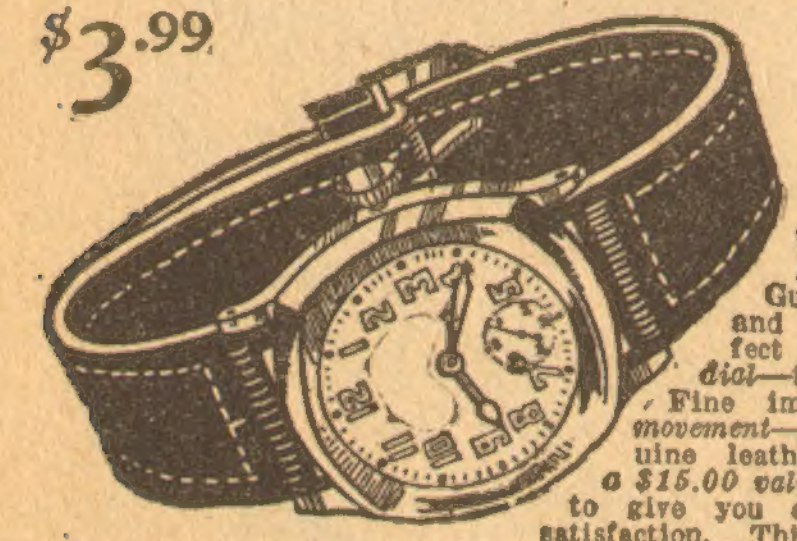

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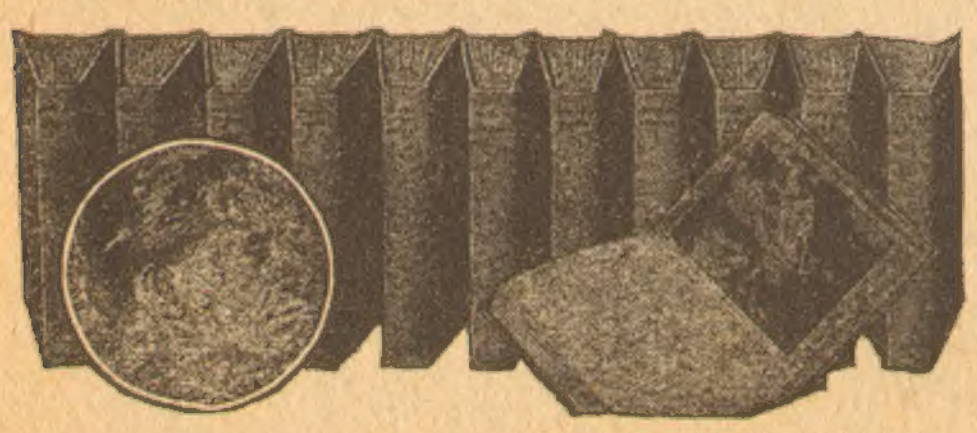

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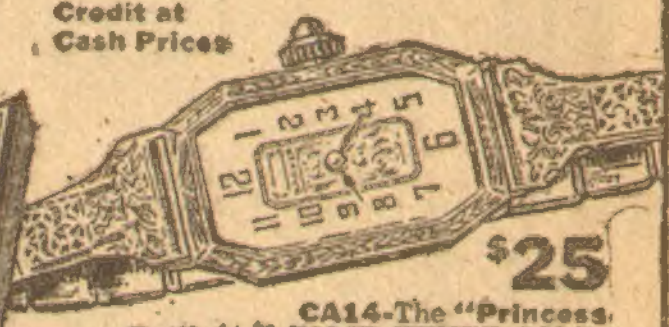

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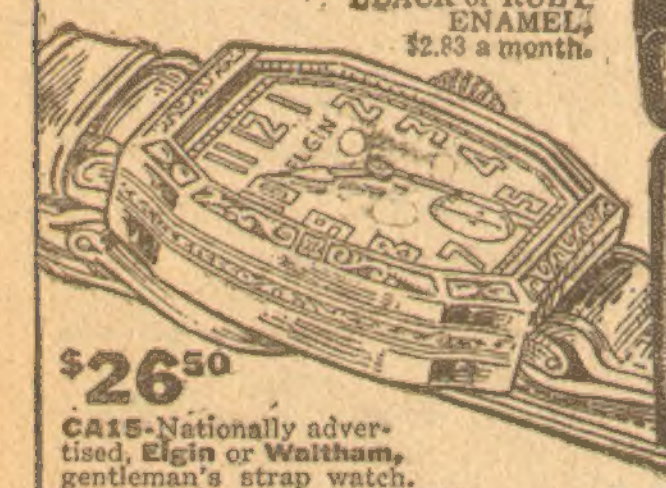

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Frontier Stories

HARRY E. MAULE
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CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN — **H. C. Murphy**

NIGHT RAID—Novel — **Ernest Haycox** — **3**
"Guns up—here comes that dam' Indigo Bowers!"

LIGHT DUTY — **L. Patrick Greene** — **33**
South African fever made Dynamite Drury slow, but far from harmless.

RIGHT SMACK AT YOU—Novel — **W. Wirt** — **45**
Potent the peril that lured Red Dolan and Jimmie Cordie to barren Turkestan

SNARING THE SEA FOX — **James K. Waterman** — **75**
A Yankee mocks the West African blockade.

KULTUS JIM — **Elliott W. Michener & Jack Laird** — **85**
"We sure go downstream whizzin'—but it's hell a-comin' back!"

COW HORSES — **Reeves Axtell** — **94**
Salty horse talk by one Arizona hombre, pictures by another.

SINGED MOTHS — **James P. Olsen** — **99**
Tom Saylor tackles a hot one in the oilfields.

THE SUN GOD'S EYES — **Edwin Glenn Huddleston** — **105**
Death throbs in the Tockinoon drums.

WINGS IN THE SPANISH LEGION — **Lee Robinson** — **110**
A ripping tale of desert warfare—and the unexpected.

THE ENDS-OF-THE-EARTH CLUB — **Frontier Adventurers** — **121**
Where trail-wise hombres take their ease.

THE TRADING POST — **Frontier Readers** — **126**
A pow-wow place for everybody.

FRONTIER FACT-STORIES

PAYNE OUTRAN A HORSE—Early training counted — **Guy Rader** — **44**

RAPIDS RISK FOR GOLD—In days of '49 — **Harold J. Ashe** — **109**

HAND GUNS—Opinions vary — **Carl Elmo Freeman** — **120**

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With this issue FRONTIER STORIES suspends publication. We wish to thank our loyal readers, and also to call to their attention SHORT STORIES and WEST, both published twice a month, and in which will be found the cream of the work of authors who have made the title FRONTIER STORIES a criterion for exciting and authentic stories of the world's outposts. You will find the headquarters for The Ends of the Earth Club at SHORT STORIES, same address, and running stronger than ever. All the other departments of FRONTIER will be found in either WEST or SHORT STORIES.

April 1929

Frontier Stories

Vol. X No. 1

NIGHT RAID

By ERNEST HAYCOX

Author of "Guns Up," "Starlight and Gunflame," etc.

"Mind your own business" was the Golden Rule of the rangeland—the code to which big Joe Breedlove and salty Indigo Bowers clung through thick and thin. Just once did they violate it—but when they did, pistol-fog rolled like night-mist across the Elkhorn range, and the roar of guns was like summer thunder

Chapter I

INDIGO FORETELLS SORROW

NIGHT had come again, a soft desert night that damped the intolerable heat of day. In another half-hour the small campfire gleaming on the edge of the gravelly creek would be a grateful barrier against the sharp, still cold. Overhead swung the infinite canopy of heaven, its metal blue expanse shimmering with stars; far and low on the horizon the moon hung at a crazy angle, a thin-edged crescent that gave no light. A thousand miles of desert and mountain marched to this solitary outpost of man and seemed to stop, while the bark and whine of distant coyotes and the murmuring of the creek alone broke the spell of silence. Sage smell was in the air; the smell of bacon

and coffee had not yet quite gone. Two horses browsed beyond the rim of light, picketed. Blankets were down, and upon them stretched two weary travelers who had ridden a good many leagues in search of rest and surcease from the carping cares of men. Indigo Bowers and Joe Breedlove camped again.

No two individuals could possibly have been more dissimilar. Indigo was short and thin; his pointed, saturnine face was homely beyond description. And as he sat humped over, staring into the flames, it appeared that he thought of all the sorrows and all the troubles the universe bequeathed its mortals. No ray of cheer broke the set pessimism of lips, no trace of humor leavened his faded blue eyes. Life, it appeared, was just one dirty trick after another. Which is to say that Indigo Bowers was in his usual frame of mind and in his usual state of health.

Joe Breedlove, on the other hand, was a tall and muscular man. The firelight gleamed along his corn-yellow hair and snapped in his hazel eyes. He was looking up—up to the stars, his body relaxed and his face mirroring the perfect serenity that was so much a part of him. Joe made friends easily, and once made these friends clove to him forever; there was a mellowness about him, a whimsicality that tempered all his acts and all his words. The world, according to Joe, was the only world available, therefore why fret?

HE DROPPED his attention to the gloomy Indigo, fine wrinkles sprang around his temples. "Providence," said he in a voice that plucked the strings of melody, "sure thought about man's comfort when it created night an' shadows. Me, I like shadows. It's all the same as takin' a bath after a hard day's work."

Indigo emitted a rasping sound of dissent and his cigarette drooped from a corner of his thin lips. "Yeah? There you go again with that doggone romantic imagination o' yours. Seems to me Providence made night because it's ashamed o' the ant-hill it created down here. Did you ever see anything more forlorn an' useless as the country we been ridin' through lately? I'm so cussed full o' sand I grate every time I move. I'm scorched like a kernel o' popcorn. Been lookin' at sagebrush an' distance so long I got a perpetual headache."

"Well," admitted Joe, mildly reluctant, "it's a mite sparse at that, but it's sure fine grazin' land for cows."

"A cow don't know no better," argued Indigo. "Personal, I don't like this land. A self respectin' buzzard wouldn't lay an egg in it. How long we been on this so-called journey o' rest anyhow?"

"Six weeks barrin' two days," said Joe.

"Yeah, an' how much rest have we got?" Indigo grew querulous. "It's funny how folks pick on us. Nothin' but trouble, nothin' but scraps. If ever we back-track we sure will have to pick another route. Six towns in a row is layin' for our hides. Rest—huh!"

"I'm a man o' peace," drawled Joe "I don't like to fight. If you didn't pack a temper full o' poison——"

Indigo stilled his partner with a gesture of a skinny arm and raised his somber countenance against the night. His nostrils dilated slightly, like a hound keening the wind. "They's trouble somewhere out there. I know it. Sounds to me like them coyotes is japin' us. I wish folks wouldn't pick on me."

Joe met this with a skeptical lift of eyebrows. His partner was like a bantam rooster strutting around the arena. Indigo's past life consisted of successive chapters of violence. He claimed he wanted to be left alone yet it was always noticeable that when in the proximity of a fight he grew strangely restless. It only took one small word of invitation to bring him into the tangled affairs of other people. Many men had been deceived by Indigo's wisp of a frame; when he moved, he moved like dynamite, leaving destruction in his wake. And no amount of logic ever could convince him that he was other than a mild and inoffensive creature who had been unjustly picked on. He stirred on his blanket, the washed-out blue eyes darting around the rim of light.

"Just the same, they's somethin' goin' on around here I don't like."

JOE BREEDLOVE never moved, yet there was a slight tightening of his big frame. A sage bush rustled out beyond. Something stirred, the gravelly ground marked a body passing across the darkness, and the horses became uneasy. Both partners became unnaturally still. Out of the shadows marched a rawboned man with the russet beard of Judas and eyes that were brilliant black; a burly creature coated with dust and a general flavor about him that augured a shattering of the commandments. He squatted by the fire looking swiftly from partner to partner.

"Howdy, gents!"

"Huh," grunted Indigo, visibly annoyed. The fellow's approach violated all etiquette. Indigo believed in etiquette on the range.

"Nice evenin'," stated Joe Breedlove, mildly. "Stir up the fire."

"I ain't cold," said the newcomer and relapsed to a full silence.

It was up to him to announce himself and the partners waited, each staring into the flames. Joe Breedlove appeared to be in a deep and profound study; the placid benevolence of his face never changed. It was otherwise with Indigo and with each passing moment he grew more and more restive until it seemed he was about to suffer an acute attack of indigestion. Then there was another sound beyond the fire's rim and a second newcomer hitched into the light and squatted by the blaze; he was built like a pole and his jaw was nearly as long as that of a horse. Once more the partners were inspected in a swift and sidling manner.

"Howdy, gents."

"The same," murmured Joe and casually draped himself in a manner that left his right arm free to swing. Indigo muttered and morosely held his peace. A moment later he flung up his head to find three other strangers marching out of the night. One by one they dropped to their haunches, none of them bothering to pass a greeting. Indigo looked across the flames to his partner, and Joe's left lid fluttered. The five visitors were as grave as redmen; the one who owned the russet beard looked around the circle and announced succinctly, "It's them all right."

"Yeah, I reckon," observed the gentleman with the horse jaw.

"You'll excuse the manner o' droppin' in," said the red-bearded gentleman to Joe and Indigo, with just a trace of deference in his words. "But we wasn't shore it was you boys. Elbow Jim is the only one which ever saw yuh an' he's laid up in town with a lot o' concussions where a hoss kicked him. I guess he's out of it for some days. Anyhow we sorter hung back an' watched yuh sashayin' acrost the country today. Elbow Jim said it'd be a big man an' a leetle man, so's we waits to get a good look."

It never took much to soothe Indigo's feelings. A sort of an apology had been offered and he accepted it with magnificent forbearance. "That's all right—that's plumb natchral."

"Well," went on the one with the red beard, "it was Elbow Jim's idea to write an' ask yuh to come down here. He had a lot o' confidence in you boys. Mebbe he told yuh all about it in the letter?"

Here was a situation. Indigo, never a great hand at deception, kept still. But Joe waved an arm. "I reckon he didn't say much. A letter, you know, is sorter public."

"That's right," agreed the red-bearded one. "Elbow'd be pretty secret. Well, it was his idea. But since he ain't here to unravel it I guess we'll have to go on without him. Me, I'm Bo Annixter. He's—" pointing to the fellow with the horse jaw, "Shirtsleeve Smith." And Bo Annixter went around the circle, calling names. The partners gravely nodded.

"The point is," proceeded this red-bearded Annixter, "we're plumb able to rustle our own critters, but lately the county's sorter tightened up. They got a sher'ff who's watchin' the railroad. We had a gent who took our stuff an' got it to market for us.

Well, he quit—scared out. Reckon he's made all the money he wants so he's figgerin' to be an honest gent from now on. Which leaves us up a tree."

"The country," opined Indigo, "ain't what it used to be."

"Now you said somethin'," agreed Bo Annixter. His black eyes stabbed Indigo and passed on to Joe, leaving Indigo dubious. This fellow with the red foliage looked mighty tough and so did the other four rustlers. Doggoned tough.

"That's why Elbow wrote you boys. We figgered we'd rustle the cows an' run 'em to the county line. There's where you'd take 'em an' fog 'em to yore hangout. Elbow said yuh allus had a place to sell."

"Well—" murmured Indigo and waved his arm vaguely.

"Sure—sure," interposed Annixter hastily. "We ain't askin' nothin' about yore location. Jus' take 'em an' get rid of 'em. We split fifty-fifty. That's fair enough, ain't it?"

"That's downright handsome," agreed Indigo, almost with enthusiasm.

"It ain't everybody we'd trust like that," said Annixter. "But Elbow said you was four-square gents. So that goes with us."

"Our word," declared Indigo, rearing up, "is good as gov'ment security."

ALL the while Joe Breedlove had maintained silence. Indigo, meeting his partner's attention, was suddenly aware that he talked too much. And, upon a second observation of the five rustlers—seeing them sitting around so watchfully, and seeing the firelight slant across their hard jowls—he decided he had played the situation a little too far.

"It's like this," went on Bo Annixter, turning to Joe Breedlove. There was something about the golden-haired man that always attracted attention and respect. Inevitably he was looked upon as the leader of the pair; perhaps it was his smile, or the lazy way he carried himself, or the unbroken serenity of his countenance—at any rate when men dealt with the partners they soon came to ignore Indigo. Ordinarily Indigo would have resented such a thing, he would have risen upon his haunches and launched his defiance. But with Joe trailing beside him it was different; deep down in his heart Indigo admitted Joe to be the better head. Which was saying much for Indigo.

"It's like this," repeated Annixter. "They's the Elkhorn outfit five miles from here. Old man Stovall runs it. They's only five hands on the place. We ain't ever touched it, but now's the time. Part o' their summer range is right near the county line an' they ain't but one hand ridin' thataway. See? Shucks, it's easy. All clear?"

Joe's head bobbed slightly, whereupon Indigo began to worry. He depended always on Joe to get them out of trouble—and here was Joe drifting into stormy waters.

"Fine," said Annixter, and slapped his thigh. "Then we might as well get at it tonight."

Indigo bent forward to poke the fire and in so doing got a chance to look well at his partner. Joe appeared never so placid as now. By and by he stirred.

"How far is that Elkhorn ranch-house?" he asked, mildly.

"Five miles due south."

More silence on Joe's part. And this very silence plainly increased Annixter's respect. "Of course," said the man, "mebbe it ain't very big potatoes for you boys. Elbow says yuh handle consid'ble beef. Still, they's a neat profit. If yuh want, yuh can sit right on the county line an' we'll rustle 'em to yuh."

Joe squared his shoulders. "I guess not tonight. My partner and me always like to look a layout over before we do business."

"Shucks, it's pie," protested Annixter, evidently not liking the delay.

"Shore," agreed Joe. "But it's a rule of ours. Never pays to make a pass in the dark. That's why we're still free gents."

Annixter silently debated; the rest of the rustlers waited. There was something so taciturn and so calmly confident about

them that Indigo, as hardy a gentleman as he was, grew nervous. The sooner he and Joe were out of this the better. "Yeah," said he in a dry voice. "it's a habit o' ours."

"All right then," agreed Annixter. "We'll sleep on it. Run over t'morra an' look. We'll do it that evenin'."

The rustlers rose and went back into the darkness. Saddle gear jingled, horses moved into view; and presently the whole five were back with their blankets, bedding down for the night. Indigo, scratching his head, felt the sweat trickle down his cheek. And it made him mad. The fire died and the camp slumbered, though Indigo's rest was broken by the memory of Annixter's beady eyes.

AT DAWN the partners were up and away, leaving to Annixter and the other four the assurance that they would be back at the same rendezvous around noon. Joe was profoundly buried in one of his meditative spells and Indigo kept the silence for a good quarter of a mile, or until he looked back and saw the rustlers streaming across the land in another direction. Then he could hold himself no longer.

"Who started this doggone deception, anyhow?" he demanded.

"I'd be obliged for the information myself," said Joe, rousing. His mild glance fell upon Indigo with more than a passing interest. Indigo rose to his dignity.

"Don't look at me like that. I didn't tell 'em we was the gents they wanted to meet. Well, not exactly. Why didn't you speak up an' say it was all a mistake?"

"Why didn't you?" countered Joe, rolling himself a cigarette and studying the horizon with a far off gaze.

"I thought about it," admitted Indigo, "but judgin' from appearances it looked to me as if the news might've irritated 'em some."

"That was my conclusion likewise," agreed Joe. "And what's the use of disturbin' folks' feelin's?"

"Well," summed up Indigo, "we're supposed to be a couple of high-class rustlers from the county to the north. Must be awful high-class, the way they trust us. An' we're supposed to be friends to this jasper Elbow Jim who's laid up with a belted coco. What gets me is how quick they figgered we was somebody we ain't. Awful careless."

"I sorter suspect," put in Joe, "that we camped on the spot the two parties was to meet. Indigo, wouldn't it be real interestin' if them two real rustlers should arrive about now, or if this gent Elbow Jim should appear on the scene?"

"I dunno," muttered Indigo in apparent despair, "why people should pick on us so. I don't see nothin' interestin' about said eventualities. All I see is a lot o' trouble. Told you so last night."

Indigo observed that Joe had a tight and familiar look upon his face. It meant profound thought and Indigo felt the chill of anticipation. It couldn't be that this easy-going partner of his— No, Joe never horned into a strange game. Still, as a kind of feeler, he put forth a general statement. "The farther we ride an' the quicker we ride the sooner we'll be out o' this mess."

"That sounds sensible," murmured Joe, still engrossed in his thoughts.

Indigo was vaguely disappointed. "Mebbe we should stop at the next town an' tell the sheriff." But in a moment he answered that for himself. "No, it wouldn't be none of our business, wouldn't it? Same as spyin'. But, say, how about droppin' into this Elkhorn outfit an' passin' a hint?"

"That ain't much different from tellin' the hounds o' the law, is it? Why butt into somebody else's affairs? It's their game, not ours."

Indigo rode in moody silence for a mile before muttering, "I guess it's none of our business."

Joe had no answer for that. Indigo studied his partner surreptitiously and couldn't quite get a perverse idea out of his head that the smiling and debonair Joe was still on the rack of indecision. At the end of another ten minutes he repeated his remark. "I guess it's none of our business."

"That's right," declared Joe, as if he'd come to a decision. "We ride."

"Oh, hell!" snorted Indigo

Joe grinned at his partner. "I thought you was tryin' to avoid any more trouble?"

"Well, but look at it," grunted Indigo. "It seems sorter stinkin' mean to me. There's that old gent who prob'ly don't deserve no misfortune. There's all them nice beeves—Joe, it don't seem right."

"Yeah, and there's all that trouble to fiddle your feet in," countered Joe. "Why don't you speak the real reason?"

Indigo refused to answer. He proceeded with a kind of smouldering excitement in his eyes and a feeling that his partner was wholly unreasonable and entirely too cautious. He knew as well as any man of the range could know that the first law was to mind his own business and not to tamper with another's quarrels unless definitely asked. Still, it seemed to him a bet was being overlooked.

UP FROM the distance rose a ranch-house surrounded by corrals and outbuildings and a scattering of cottonwoods. Joe studied the scene between half closed eyes.

"I guess," said he with admirable casualness, "we'd better drop in an' get fresh water, hadn't we?"

Indigo nodded, still resentful. They rode toward the house and presently reined in before the porch. Over the doorway spread an immense set of elkhorns. On the porch posts someone had imprinted the brand of the outfit with a hot iron—a miniature elkhorn. There was an ancient settee beside the door and in it reclined a man of about sixty with dead white hair and a florid face. He seemed quite hale and hearty, though a buffalo robe was thrown across his knees. Seeing the two partners he raised his hand by way of greeting. "Light and rest, boys."

"Why, thanks," replied Joe, eyes lingering a moment on the elkhorn brand, "but we're just passin' through. We'd trouble you, though, to show us the water. Canteens dry."

The man raised his voice, calling. "Oh, Julie!" Then he apologized. "I'd get up if I wasn't dead from the waist down. My girl will take care of you. Come from the north, eh?"

"Yeah," said Joe, only half hearing him. A girl stood in the doorway; a girl in her twenties with auburn hair and a rounding, supple body. The porch was shaded, yet it seemed to Joe Breedlove that the sunlight dwelt on her face. Gray eyes met and smiled at him.

"Julie," said the man, "take the boys' canteens an' fill 'em like a good girl."

Joe slid from the saddle, removing his hat. He collected the two canteens and passed them to the girl as if it were a ceremony. "Hate to trouble you, ma'am," he murmured, and again his voice plucked the strings of melody. Out of the saddle he made a fine showing, tall and muscular and self contained; a mature man who looked as if he loved life, who plainly had been through the world and seen it in many moods and yet could be whimsical and untouched by malice. The girl threw up her chin to study him, half grave, half smiling; just a trace of color came to her cheeks, then she retreated.

"Better stay to chuck," advised the elder man.

"It would be a command any other time," was Joe's courteous answer. "But we're just a mite rushed. Your range, I take it—your brand."

The man's chest filled. "You bet. Henry Stovall's Elkhorn ranch. Ask anybody in town about the name or the brand and see what they tell you. When I come here I used to ride herd on the Crow warriors. Long time ago. I've hired an' fired a thousand men—half of which is long dead. Now look. Four punchers and a foreman, a girl worth all of 'em and a paralyzed old duck better dead. But I bet I live to be ninety. Ain't that the way?"

"Who knows what the hole card is?" drawled Joe. "But it's tough not to be able to fork a horse."

Stovall's hands moved. "I'm a cattleman. Been one all my life. Be one after I die unless they make me shear sheep down in perdition. Does it hurt, not havin' a horse? I reckon yore man enough to know the answer to that."

"Well, you can still smell the wind," was Joe's grave answer, "an' hear the beavertails bellerin' out in the brakes. That's somethin'."

AROUND the corner of the house rolled a young man with dust on his chubby face. He was hatless and jet black hair curled around his head. Responsibility seemed to rest heavily on his mind, for he was very grave and he studied the partners with a quick, measured glance. Joe, who was a good hand at judging his own kind, decided that this chap was competent even if he wasn't much beyond voting age; and he returned the short nod with an amicable jerk of his own head.

"That calico is busted to work," said the youngster, to Stovall. "But he won't never be worth a whole lot."

"Let it lay," replied Stovall. "You boys are all a little heavy-handed with the ridin' stock. Takes an old-timer to deal with the cayuses." He turned his attention toward the parners again. "I could use some experienced hands. Want a job?"

"What for?" interposed the young man with just a trace of belligerence. "Ain't we got enough men already, considerin' everything?"

Stovall spoke soothingly. "All right, Slip. I know you're the foreman an' it's your place to hire an' fire. But I like old heads around me an' I ain't had none for a powerful long time. I'm repeatin'—there's a job for both you boys."

The girl came out with the canteens, in time to hear her father offer the partners work. A kind of alertness crossed her face, a touch of expectancy. Joe took the canteens and entirely by accident his big paw brushed her white hand. Thus they returned steady inspections until Joe dropped his head, smiling. "I'm obliged," said he and moved to his pony. Slip, the foreman, was still young enough not to be able to conceal jealousy; his lips tightened, he was not far removed from sullenness.

Joe climbed to the saddle; his eyes looked to the spreading elkhorns and again to the girl. "Thank you kindly, sir. But we've already got employment. We'll be ridin'."

The foreman disappeared back of the house. Joe and Indigo rode off. A hundred yards removed the tall partner turned in the saddle and raised his hand as a farewell. The girl still stood on the porch and her arm came up in reply.

All this while Indigo had said nothing. In company he seldom spoke, he always felt ill at ease and willing to have the more polished Joe take care of the amenities. But he missed nothing, he thoroughly inventoried the ranch and its state of prosperity in the few moments they had been by the porch. And he also had observed the glance the girl bestowed upon Joe. Well, many men admired Joe—and some women. How could it be otherwise? He turned to his partner and discovered that Joe was studying him quite soberly.

"News to me we had a job," grunted Indigo.

"I guess——" began Joe, and thereupon stopped. The youthful foreman came spurring toward them. The partners halted and waited till he came up.

"Didn't aim to be unsociable back there," he explained, still a little surly. "But the old man is losin' his grip. Think's he's better off than he really is. Always wants to hire somebody. You savvy, I guess."

"Sho'," murmured Joe.

INDIGO got the idea these two fellows were sparring with each other; the foreman was measuring Joe and Joe in turn seemed to be reading the foreman. The silence was broken by the youth.

"See any tracks north of here?"

"What kind of tracks?" drawled Joe.

"I'd guess you know what kind of tracks I'm meanin'," replied the foreman significantly.

"We're only strangers passin' through," observed Joe in a curiously soft voice.

"Then you wouldn't know what's goin' on in this county," said the foreman. With no more parley he wheeled and rode off. The partners went on until the ranch buildings were lost below the undulating ground. Then, as if both were animated by the same idea, they came to a stop.

"Well, Indigo."

"Well?"

"You know blamed well we can't go an' squeal to the sher'ff," said Joe with a trace of impatience. "We ain't built that way."

"Didn't say we was, did I?"

"An' it'd be the same if we tried to tell those folks at the ranch, wouldn't it? We don' play double."

"You say it," grunted Indigo, not able to fathom his partner's intentions.

"I guess we better sashay back to the beetle-faced gents an' see this through."

"Yeah?" snorted Indigo. "So we should turn rustlers. Then what?"

"Well, if they rustle the critters in the dark and turn 'em over to us, we can throw the stock right back on the Elkhorn range can't we? Nobody's the wiser for the time bein'. Then we pull stakes and get out of this country. By then the real pair o' rustlers from the north will show up an' Annixter's gang will realize they've spilled the beans. They'll shy off from poachin' on Elkhorn again, figgerin' the ranch will be warned. And meanwhile the Elkhorn riders'll see all them tracks on their territory an' keep strict watch. Don't it work out? Nobody's hurt by the transaction an' we won't be squealin'. Leaves our conscience plumb clean."

The distinction was somewhat too fine for Indigo's forthright soul. He said as much, adding, "Supposin' the real pair is on deck when we go back? Or supposin' this gent Elbow Jim has showed up?"

"All we need is today an' tonight. It's a gamble we got to take."

"I dunno why it is you always got to do things the hard way," muttered Indigo. "Always got to embroider an' hemstitch till we're up to our neck in the soup."

"Great Caesar, wasn't you the fellow who wanted trouble a minute ago?" inquired Joe.

"In moderation," was Indigo's reply. "I want a run for my money. This is jus' foolish. Nothin' but calamity can come of it."

"Well, then, we'll keep headin' south an' forget it," decided Joe.

"Oh, hell, didn't I say I was willin'?" snapped Indigo. "Let's go. But jus' remember we're turnin' illegal. Don't forget it none. Mebbe we got good intentions but when we're caught nobody's goin' to know it. I don't see nothin' but sorrow. Well, if we got to do it, then we got to. Come on."

They described a wide circle in the prairie and struck north toward the rendezvous with Annixter and his rustlers. Joe Broadlove was as serene and benevolent as the winds of May; Indigo's pale blue eyes took on a certain narrowed fixity. The both of them were riding into action and each accepted the fact with characteristic expressions.

Chapter II

A Night Raid

WHEN the partners, thoughtful and somewhat wary, reached the meeting place by the creek, Annixter's gang had not yet returned, and for this breathing spell both Joe and Indigo were thankful. The sun stood at its high mark; being normal men they were hungry, so they boiled a little coffee, fried some bacon and rummaged cold biscuits out of their rolls. After that they smoked in the shade of the cottonwoods, seeming drowsy yet not for an instant relaxing from a constant scrutiny of the horizon. They meant, above all else, to see the rustlers approaching in time enough to count noses. The sun slid west and the afternoon droned along.

"The beetle-eyed jasper," muttered Indigo, "said we didn't have to do any actual rustlin'. Said we could wait on the county line an' he'd bring the critters to us. Sounds reasonable to me."

"That won't work," argued Joe. "We've got to know where they get said cows else we won't know where to take 'em back."

"Was you aimin' to set each brute in its identical tracks?" questioned Indigo, scornfully. "Joe, I never mistrust yore abilities, but I shore do know you've got an awful habit o' addin' a lot o' unnecessary fancy work to an ordinary chore."

"The closer we stay to those fellows from now to midnight the safer we'll be," returned Joe. "We got a responsibility and we might as well see it through proper."

"Yeah, you're always hell for proper," grumbled Indigo. "Wish I had more cattridges."

"Dust off to the east," announced Joe.

The partners rose up in unison and stationed themselves at no great distance from the waiting horses. The dust cloud grew, and presently riders spurred through it into sight. Indigo squinted long and carefully.

"One more thing," murmured Joe, the words tightening, "in case of trouble and in case it's each fellow for himself, hit for those bluffs toward the northeast there."

"Then," snapped Indigo, rising to his full five feet, five inches, "we'd better hit pronto. They was only five gents last night an' right now they's six. Bet it's that Elbow Jim jasper. What about it?"

Joe looked for himself. Six riders came along at a lope, side by side, rising and falling in unison. The partners swapped somber glances and moved toward their horses. Presently they were a-saddle, yet they tarried.

"No use runnin'," grunted Indigo. "I don't feel crooked enough to let a bunch o' mugs like them chase me."

"Make it two," murmured Joe. He had a small, set smile on his face; and as the party swung into the grove his arm hung free beside his gun. Indigo appeared to have another severe attack of indigestion; his homely, wizened features were twisted at odd angles and the light of battle flickered in his blue eyes, turning them to a queer shade of green. Annixter, foremost, flung up an arm and the group halted. The sixth man, both partners were quick to note, was a shackling gentleman with a fever and ague face. He sat crooked over as if he were saddle galled, his clothes were wrinkled and one side of his head was wrapped in a blue neck piece. Undeniably this was Elbow Jim, and Elbow Jim at the present moment looked toward the partners with a vacant, unknowing glance.

ANNIXTER slid to the ground, speaking to Joe. "Elbow, the damned fool, wouldn't stay in his bunk. Had to come along. No use tellin' him anything, but he'll croak for it yet."

Joe was the picture of laziness. "Hello there, Elbow."

Elbow Jim seemed to be startled. He focussed his attention, much as a man might strive to see through a fog. "Who are you?" he growled.

Annixter, shielded by his horse, tapped his head with a finger and winked at Breedlove.

"Shucks," protested Joe, still talking to Elbow, "don't you know yore old friends? Remember the time——"

"Who are you?" demanded Elbow. "What's all this foolishness about? I don't know yuh atall."

Annixter spoke up. "It's the boys you wrote to up north, Elbow. They come down, like you asked. We're all set now."

"No, we ain't set," contradicted Elbow Jim. "Never laid eyes on either party. It's a frame-up."

Elbow spoke with energy; the tone carried conviction. Annixter's head reared and his sparkling black eyes flashed from partner to partner, narrowing and hardening. The rest of the rustlers sat like ramrods in the saddles. Indigo, never a man to endure

suspense any length of time, broke in angrily.

"What's the matter with you, anyhow? Ain't you got good sense?"

"What's yore monnickers?" asked Elbow craftily

"My name?" snorted Indigo. And by the way he weaved in the saddle, Joe knew his partner was about to fling down the gage of battle "If anybody around these premises wants to hear my name it's——"

"Hold on," interrupted Joe He leaned toward Elbow and spoke persuasively. "Now, Elbow, don't you remember the night in the Dollarhide Saloon?"

Joe had seen that saloon in the course of their trip southward It happened to be in the town that was the seat of the county to the north—that county in which he and Indigo were supposed to do their rustling. And since Elbow Jim was a friend of these two unknown rustlers it stood to reason he must have met them on their own territory and possibly in that very saloon. It was a chance shot in the dark. Elbow obviously struggled with his reason. He had been badly battered on the head and most of his faculties jarred out of him. "Don't you remember that, Elbow?" repeated Joe, in the tone of one talking to a backward child.

Of a sudden Elbow dropped from his horse and walked away. "My God, what's all this? Am I bugs? My haid hurts."

There had been a faint trace of suspicion in Annixter's eyes, but this last moment seemed to dispel it. He came toward the partners, lowering his voice. "No wonder his coco hurts. They's a dent in it big enough to sink an aig. Reckon he's off the track for keeps. Ain't been talkin' straight since he got kicked."

"Looks some thinner to me," observed Joe with an air of considered judgment.

Annixter nodded, thinking of other things. "Well, how about it? See what you want to see this mornin'?"

"I reckon," agreed Joe. "Any time you say."

Annixter's shoulder's rose, his jaws closed like a trap. "Fine! It's three hours to dusk. We travel then."

IN THAT gloaming hour when dusk marched out of the horizons and the cobalt shadows piled thicker over the land the party swung to horse and turned due east. They traveled silently and swiftly for a half mile, Annixter in the lead, Elbow Jim alongside. The injured rustler kept mumbling to himself, turning a puzzled eye on the partners. And finally he stopped, bringing the cavalcade to a halt with him.

"I'm goin' back," he announced.

"What for?" demanded Annixter, showing impatience. "Don't gum up the works, Elbow. We got business on hand an' it ain't like you to lag."

"I'm goin' back," repeated Elbow Jim stubbornly. "Seems like I remember I was to meet some fellows by the crick. It seems like I was."

"Why, you darned fool, here they are, right with us," reasoned Annixter.

But Elbow Jim shook his head. "They ain't the ones. Seems like I was to meet somebody." And without any more argument he left them and rode away. Annixter's head dropped, he stared at the ground for quite a spell. By and by he looked to the partners and in the interval it seemed as if he fought with his suspicions. Indigo's eyes, not visible to the rest of the party in the shadows, turned green again; Joe was relaxed and casual, though his attention never wavered from the leader.

"Maybe," he suggested, "I better go round him up."

"Let him mosey," decided Annixter. "He ain't much help anyhow." His hard glance measured Joe and fell away. "We ride."

They went on into the deepening night, hoofs drumming the ground. A small wind sprang up, the heat of day vanished. Once more the stars were out and the moon hung lifeless on the world's rim. Annixter kept a steady course into the east for an hour, then gradually veered south, checking the gait imperceptibly with the passing minutes. Joe judged that they were at a far corner of the Elkhorn range, traveling away from

the ranch buildings all the while. It also seemed to him Annixter was circling toward his objective, not going in a straight line. Annixter, he decided, was a capable hombre and one who easily assumed authority. Certain it was the rest of the rustlers obeyed him without a murmur of dissent; a hard, unscrupulous fellow who would put a good front on anything he did. Joe's experience with lawless gentry was wide and varied; most of them were braggarts and bullies, with a courage that faded in a showdown. He rated Annixter as being of tougher grain. An inner warning bothered him; Annixter's bulky body made a formidable shadow in the darkness.

The leader grunted, and the group came to a halt. Annixter spoke in a rumbling undertone. "All right, Shirtsleeve."

Shirtsleeve Smith proceeded on alone. Annixter touched Joe's arm. "Ain't far now. When we round the brutes we hit direct north into them buttes. They's a pass thataway we go through. County line beyond. It's yore play then. I guess you know the country over there?"

"Yeah."

"How long will it take you boys to polish off the deal?"

Joe answered easily. "Three days."

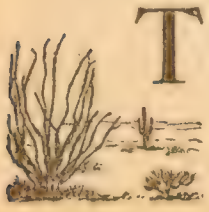
Annixter seemed to be surprised. "That's pretty sudden."

"We do it sudden," responded Joe. "No use havin' illegal beef around you any longer'n necessary. It's the reason we're still out o' jail."

"Elbow thinks a lot o' you boys," said Annixter. Joe caught a trailing doubt in the words, but he forebore answering. Shirtsleeve Smith's shadow returned.

"All clear."

"We ride," grunted Annixter.



THEY traveled slower this time, the ponies' hoofs making a small and sibilant confusion in the sand. Within fifteen minutes they stopped again. Cattle ahead, cattle smell in the air and the vague outline of their presence. Annixter spoke. "All right, Shirtsleeve—Red—Mac."

The indicated ones left the group and merged with the velvet pall. The warning in Joe's head grew clearer and more insistent. This Annixter party did things too competently. No fuss, no excitement. It was like a drill. Too smooth, too doggoned smooth. Probably Annixter had a lot of other plans concealed behind that red foliage—for instance, in case he decided there was trickery in the partners' presence. Running those critters back to their original range wasn't going to be half as easy as it seemed.

Cattle moved slowly. Annixter's voice was slightly brittle. "Go ahead, Buck."

The rustler remaining with Annixter rode away, heading toward the Elkhorn ranch buildings. "Allus keep a man on our tail to watch for trouble," murmured Annixter.

Joe feigned a hearty approval. "I shore like yore style, Annixter. Wish you was with us boys up north."

"It's an idea," grunted Annixter. The man was human enough to be flattered. "This country's gettin' washed out. They's a sher'ff who's hell on wheels. Elbow won't never be good no more. An' we're gettin' too prominent in the county. Said sher'ff was elected on a promise to clean us out an' the fool actually figgers to do it. Well, here we are."

Cattle moved by them at a shambling, uneasy pace. Soft oaths broke the night, and the slap of quirts. Annixter and the partners fell in behind. Joe assumed a sudden authority. "Lay on 'em now. We've got to mosey."

Annixter mildly protested. "What's the rush? This is easy."

"My style," replied Joe a little more crisply. "Didn't I say we worked fast?"

The pace increased; Annixter sidled off and was gone for some time, during which interval Indigo edged closer to his partner and started to speak. Joe interrupted with a quick phrase. "Neat work, ain't it Indigo? I like these boys' style." And Indigo, warned, held his tongue. A rider drew up

to them, coming from some unexpected angle, and rode between, never saying a word. Annixter returned, also silent. The mass of shadow that was the rustled stock weaved uncertainly. Hoofs and horns clacked; the pound and shuffle of their gallop rose into the night.

"Shirtsleeve—drop back," snapped Annixter And the man riding between the partners faded and was lost. "We're leavin' a broad trail. But they was an Elkhorn rider makin' the circle this mornin' an' I doubt if he'll get around till late tomorrow. That's ample time for you boys?"

"Plenty," said Joe.

"We'll meet yuh four days from now at the crick," suggested Annixter. But Joe knew that was more of a request than a suggestion. Annixter seemed to grow more gruff as the night wore along; more distant.

"Agreed," was Joe's response.

AFTER an hour the ground began to grow rougher and the outline of the broken country stood up before them. Annixter disappeared again. When he returned Joe felt the stock turning to another point of the compass. They dipped down and up several arroyos, they passed a clump of jackpines. On they hurried. The slope grew steeper, it turned rocky underfoot, the pace slackened and the horses began to breathe harder.

"The pass," said Annixter and for the third time rode off. The cattle were at a walk. High ground stretched on either side and the walls of a small canyon narrowed on them, pinching the whole procession to a long, trickling line. There were trees up this way, the breeze scoured against them, fresh and cold. Riders lagged and fell in behind. Then they were gong up a stiff grade—a grade that of a sudden dropped into a summit meadow. The trees marched out to them, surrounded them; a coyote barked, the party came to a halt.

"Your turn, I reckon," said Annixter, returning. "Down the far slope is the county line."

Joe took off his Stetson and dropped his watch into it. Then he lit a match and discovered it was even twelve. All this had taken longer than it seemed; dawn wasn't more than four hours removed—four hours in which to undo all that had been done. "All right," said he.

"Don't let this rough country fool yuh," warned Annixter. "Bear due north. Either way from that'll push yuh into a lot o' blind pockets. I'd go on straight to the line, but it's better we go back an' make a lot o' tracks leadin' another direction. One o' the gang, howsumever, will keep a lookout around these parts after daylight. If he sees anybody comin' afore yuh get far enough off he'll send up a smoke signal. Watch yore back trail for that."

"Good enough," murmured Joe. The rustlers had collected, waiting for Annixter to finish. The man tarried, saying nothing at all, yet bending close to Joe. Joe saw only a blur of Annixter's face; then the leader withdrew.

"Four days from tonight, at the creek," he called.

"That's right," agreed Joe. "*Adios.*"

The rustlers dipped down the grade and presently the partners, listening carefully, lost the sound of them. Indigo sighed, as if he were pulling himself up by the roots. "Well, we got somethin' on our——"

Joe's arm touched him. "Easy, Indigo. Hold it a minute."

They waited five minutes longer, but nothing stirred the profound stillness of this night save the slight and uneasy movement of the stock. Joe stirred and spoke in a matter of fact voice, slightly louder that appeared necessary. "All right, now we've got to drive 'em hard as long as it's dark. Let's push 'em."

They pressed against the rear of the cattle. Indigo rode around to edge in the flanks Once more the momentum of the mass carried the small herd along the trail and across the level ground of the diminutive meadow. Under cover of this orderly confusion Joe closed upon Indigo and spoke

just above a whisper. "Keep 'em going five-ten minutes, Indigo. I'm waitin' on the trail. Think somebody's apt to be followin' us."

HE LEFT his horse at the side of the trail, back in the pines, and retraced his way afoot for a hundred yards. Here he stopped and waited. The noise of the cattle came to him as a muffled echo. Elsewhere was no movement save the slight scouring of the wind in the pine tops.

"Somethin' bothered that Annixter gent," he said to himself. "He's a shrewd duck. Think maybe he'd have a man track us till we got out o' the county, jus' to find if we was up to specifications."

He drew back a yard or so. A horse came up the slope, picking its way cautiously and with only the slight shuffle of its hoofs and the small abrasion of saddle leather to announce it. Well, there wasn't need for much caution; the noise of the herd would drown out this kind of pursuit. That fellow Annixter was nobody's fool, he took care of all bets. Joe's arm dropped toward his gun and he retreated still farther. The rider was muttering sibilantly to his animal. "Get along—get along. Don't yuh know cow smell?" Man and beast were abreast of Joe. Joe tarried one more instant; then his tall body weaved across the space and came up somewhat behind the rider. His arms swept forward and all his strength snapped into them. The horse reared. Down out of the saddle came the rider, fighting. A bellow woke the echoes as he hit the ground. Joe struck him on the face with a driving blow and his gun touched the man's ribs. "Easy, brother. Make it easy." There was a quick turning and slashing of legs and arms, a subdued volley of oaths. Joe's gun barrel laid along the fellow's head and then resistance died. The herd, evidently, had stopped for Joe couldn't make out their progress; but Indigo was coming back at the gallop.

"All right. Draw in, Indigo. I got a nibble. Bring me yore rope."

Indigo groped toward Joe. "He's out? Lessee his complexion, Joe. An' do yuh reckon the rest o' that gang heard the yelp he lets loose."

"Don't believe so. They left him behind to scout. I figger they're well on the way to the crick by now. Light a match."

Yellow light sputtered under the protection of Indigo's extended hat-brim and the flickering rays fell upon the horse-jawed Shirtsleeve Smith. Shirtsleeve was unconscious and unlovely. The light sputtered out; Indigo wasted no time with his lariat, nor did he waste gentleness as he looped and knotted the cord about the recumbent rustler. Joe started to untie the man's bandanna and fashion a gag but Indigo, catching on to the operation, interrupted. "Lemme do that. You can palaver a whole lot better'n me, but when it comes to such chores as these here I'm the golden haired lad. If yuh want to know the positive truth, Joe, that feller Annixter reminds me o' bad medicine."

"Make it two."

The partners boosted the still mentally absent Shirtsleeve Smith to his feet and carried him back through the pines to a spot that felt secluded from the open ground. Then they retraced their way toward the herd. "Good thing them brutes is tired or they'd be scattered from hell to supper. Joe, I ain't no saint, but it gripes me to be an amachoor rustler. Tain't a matter of morals either. It's a matter o' legal impediments. To state the bald facts it's a matter o' a knot under one ear."

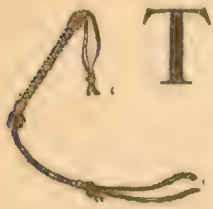
"We've got less than four hours, Indigo. Have to hustle this."

"Why not run 'em anywhere down into the flat country an' leave 'em. That's near enough ain't it?"

"Not by five miles it ain't, Indigo. Supposin' Annixter should be ridin' this way at daylight an' see 'em all ready to be pushed back up here out of sight. He'd do just that. And there'd be our good intentions shore shot to pieces."

Indigo grunted. "You're just doin' fancy work now an' you know it. Yuh just got an idea an' yuh won't let go."

"Put it like that," agreed Joe. "Let's mosey."



THEY circled the cows and milled them back upon the trail, traveling across the meadow and down the slope. Presently they were on level ground again, urging the brutes to a gallop. They had no exact idea as to where the main part of the Elkhorn herd ranged, but being old and experienced at night riding they did know the approximate direction and the approximate distance back along the route. About an hour and a half of this progress would bring them to a good enough destination. Another hour and a half would put them well out of the way—just as dawn arrived. Not exactly a comfortable margin, but still sufficient if they kept fogging on during the day.

Joe looked up to the dim stars and grinned wryly. Well, maybe Indigo was right. It was a stubborn idea, this of running the brutes back to where they originally had been. It needn't be so close, almost anywheres along here was really good enough. But Joe Breedlove, as mild and peaceable man as he was, had queer streaks of illogical sentiment in him. He loved, above all else, to put an adequate and artistic end to his chores. Indigo, now, was more of a realist. When the small and wizened one got into a jackpot his method was to drive ahead and tap somebody on the coco. That was effective, but to Joe it wasn't satisfactory. Joe's method was to use his silver tongue; if that failed then he resorted to stratagem, tied his man and lectured the unfortunate on philosophy.

In the present case there happened to be another motive. Up among those stars was the face of a girl—the clear and rounding face of Julie Stovall with her auburn hair and her gray eyes. She had looked at him with favor, there had been something of understanding in the short, grave glance. It reminded Joe of earlier days, of a time when he was a stripling and his future seemed to be settled among quiet ways. Well, that had gone under the bridge. But though time softened and mellowed the disappointment, it only took such a woman's look to unlock Joe's treasure box of memories. And then Joe's smile became a little wry and the magnificent chivalry of the man flamed high. As tonight.

Out of the darkness came a tremor of sound that was above and beyond the rumble of hoofs. Indigo had heard it too for he came in from a flank muttering.

"Hear that, Joe?"

Joe bent his head and listened. It vanished, then it came again, more strongly. Indigo grumbled. "To the right of us. Listen, we're makin' enough noise to wake the dead."

"Let the brutes run on a ways," murmured Joe. "We'll stick here."

"I'd jus' as soon orphan them cows right now."

"Easy, Indigo. Sift to the left some. You'd think the whole county was out ridin' tonight." His voice trailed to a mere whisper. "Sift. They ain't far away."

The cattle galloped on a piece then, no longer pressed, broke the pace and split in twenty different directions. Joe Breedlove saw the compact shadow of them dissolve and disappear. They were all over the compass. He heard Indigo shift restlessly in the saddle. Elsewhere was the sound of somebody circling and advancing. Elkhorn outfit—posse—rustlers? Joe didn't know, but any of the three possibilities spelled poison for he and Indigo. It was hell to be honest tonight, and it was hell to be crooked. However, the straying cows shielded them somewhat.

"Never get 'em together again," he thought to himself. "Looks as if we leave 'em here and fog."

THE outline of horse and rider moved in. Behind was the clink of a bridle chain. There was more than one and they were quietly prospecting the area, quietly dragging back and forth. Joe felt a presence to his left hand and he drew himself up, his head sweeping from side to side. Best to freeze until these gents got tired and passed by. If it happened to be Annixter's party a little lead slinging wouldn't hurt, but if it were either Elkhorn men or a posse the less gun play the better.

Indigo couldn't keep from stirring. Joe put out his arm to touch him in warning. At that moment Indigo's horse, smelling his own kind, elected to whinny. Suddenly riders drove toward the partners from all angles and there was a slapping and a jingling of gear and a challenging of voices.

"That's them! Bear down!"

Annixter's men!

"Out of this," muttered Joe, turning his horse. "Back to the buttes. Come on, Indigo, don't get reckless."

But Indigo had labored and sweated hard enough for his fun and now he meant to satisfy his ingrained instinct for trouble. Joe saw the little man rear in the stirrups; Indigo's cracked, falsetto tones sheered the night in ribald defiance. "Yuh suckers, come an' collect!"

Annixter's voice, hard and crisp seemed to carry over their heads. "Draw off, Mac." And at that somebody at their rear spurred away. Then the tornado struck. Mushrooming points of light glowed, flat waves of sound spat in their faces. They were whipsawed. Indigo's gun roared, the wizened one swayed in his saddle like a common drunk and he yelled again. "What smells around here? Polecats!" Joe, who fought more methodically sent a brace of bullets toward a gun flash on his flank. Annixter shouldn't have more than four men, for Shirtsleeve Smith was tied and cached up in the pines. But in spite of that the rustler leader had found help somewhere; he could tell it from the revolver echoes. Must be six in the bunch. And they were whirling around like raiding Indians. Joe made up his mind on the spot.

"Come on, Indigo. Shells cost money an' dead is a long time."

They reined about and raced away. For a moment the volleying diminished; then they heard Annixter's gang in full pursuit. The protection of the buttes was about a half hour off, or less and the shadows were blacker—that piling up of shadows that came just before first dawn. The sharp wind struck their cheeks, the stars were dim. On they plunged.

It seemed to Joe that they gained distance. All firing ceased for a little while and there was only the pound of their own animals beneath them. But, some minutes later, Joe's ears caught the echo of the trailing rustlers again and for the next quarter hour the partners laid on their quirts with the knowledge they were but a scant hundred yards ahead of catastrophe. Presently they reached the rougher ground and Joe veered a little. "Hear 'em, Indigo?"

"Nope."

"Neither do I. They ain't direct behind any more. Damn that Annixter gent. He's as slick as a boiled onion."

"Their hosses is about as tired as ours, Joe. An' they can't be exactly shore which direction we take."

"That ain't the answer," grunted Joe. "They got somethin' up their elbows."

"Well, there's the end o' a good deed which never got done," muttered Indigo. "I wasn't so cracked about this business o' foggin' them critters clear back. But now that them dudes have spoiled our little journey I'm all in favor o' seein' it clear through."

"We ain't finished yet," Joe replied. "We'll hole up in the timber an' think about it."

They struck the entrance to the pass, wound in and around the rugged slopes and arrived at the narrowing walls once more.

At that point disaster overtook them. Hemmed on either flank they were arrested by Aninxter's harsh and peremptory order rolling down from the fore. "You're boxed. Stop right there!"

"Not me!" cried Indigo and sank his spurs. The partners flung themselves onward. The defile rang like a forge, bullets whipped at them from front and rear. Joe felt the shock of Indigo's horse colliding against his own pony and the succeeding moment Indigo was calling up from the ground. "They plugged my brute, Joe. Go on, beat it!"

Annixter sang at them again. "Throw yore guns thisaway!"

Joe slid from the saddle and retreated to his partner. The rustlers pressed nearer from either direction, barely outlined in the dim morning's dusk. Well, they could make a fight of it yet, but what was the use of the extra killing? Annixter had only to draw back, post guards, and wait for daylight. Meanwhile here he and Indigo were, exposed to the crossfire. This was the end of one episode; tomorrow was another day.

"All right," he muttered, "we're through."

Indigo swore like a man in pain, but Joe touched his partner's arm, whispering. "Remember what we decided once, old-timer."

"Stop that parleyin'!" boomed Annixter. "Throw yore guns thisaway or we'll open up!"

The partners obeyed. Annixter's men crept along cautiously and in a moment Joe and Indigo were prisoners. Light wavered across the eastern horizon.

Chapter III

On the Ledge

IMMEDIATELY after the partners were disarmed and both tied into Joe's saddle, Annixter left a single man to guard them and withdrew down the slope a few yards to hold a parley. There seemed to be a division of opinion in the party, a heated contest between caution and recklessness in whch the leader lost ground. At first nothing but the general sound of their talk reached Joe and Indigo, but as the discussion grew warmer they caught what went on.

"Daylight's about here," said Annixter. "They'll be an Elkhorn man ridin' circle. Why not wait till dark?"

"By which time said gent will see all them tracks an' then the whole danged ranch will be on the scout. If we git 'em, we got to git 'em now."

"They'll shore trail us then," argued Annixter.

"What of it? Ain't these hills big enough to cache in till dark? Then we can slip the stuff on acrost the line."

"It's a big risk," grumbled Annixter. "Don't you boys reco'nize the fact we got to live in this section? You're out of it—we ain't."

"Risk either way. We come a hell of a long distance on Elbow's call an' we can't stew aroun' here for a week while the excitement simmers down. If we wait another day to git them brutes we're only lettin' them folks fix a nice trap. If we go round 'em up now we can chose our own country to fight in—if we got to fight."

"I don't like it," protested Annixter. After this followed a flurry of argument. Joe understood then the situation. The pair of real rustlers from the north had arrived and Annixter's party had fallen in with them. A silence came over the group, broken finally by the leader's reluctant assent. "All right. We'll go do it. But I got to leave a man out there today to take care of the Elkhorn line rider. Can't have him discover tracks an' run for help before we git everything settled an' out o' the way."

"We'll hide the critters up in the timber ontil dark," said one of the northerners. "Then we fog back with 'em. Shucks, what you afraid of?"

"Talk's cheap and it don't buy no ribbons" muttered Annixter. He returned to the partners. "What'd you highbinders do with Shirtsleeve?"

"Up in the brush takin' a wink," drawled Joe.

Annixter accepted this with an ominous mildness. "It's the fool's own fault for not bein' more careful. Well, I give it to you boys for bein' slick. We'll count up the marbles later. Elbow, come here."

The figure of Elbow Jim appeared through the filmy shadows. "Yeah?"

"You tail these fellows back into where that big cedar is. An' don't have no lapse o' memory either."

"Don't worry," mumbled Elbow. "I ain't all finished."

Annixter retreated, the whole party rode down the trail. Elbow grunted at his prisoners "Mosey up. I may be crazy, but I know a face when I see it. Go 'long."

THE horse carrying both partners moved up the trail and back to the small meadow. It was light enough now to distinguish the beaten pathway and the occasional stumps and boulders.

"Turn left," said Elbow, and circled the partners' horse to swing it off the trail into a lesser and much overgrown trace. This led them through ever thickening underbrush, down steep slopes and along miniature canyons. From the prairie this mass of buttes had not seemed large, but now that they were away from the open country everything took on greater proportions. It was a good place to hide in or be lost in. Apparently the pass cut across the most gentle part of the ridge for the longer they traveled the more they climbed and twisted; once they had sight of a waterfall spraying against sheet rock a hundred feet below. Then they were more thoroughly enmeshed in the pines and the clinging brush.

"Turn left," droned Elbow, and again rode in to press the partners' pony. They broke through what seemed a wall of trees and came out in a glade not more than fifteen feet across. Elbow stopped and got down. Daylight flooded down, dew sparkled on the grass.

"This," said Joe in genuine appreciation, "is shore pretty ain't it?"

"Nice place for a murder," was Indigo's gloomy response. "Say, fella, you goin' to keep us up on this barbecue platform much longer?"

Elbow circled the pair, looking out from under his shaggy brows with a sly shrewdness. "No tricks, no tricks on pore ol' Elbow. I may be cracked but it don't hurt my shootin' none."

"Tricks with what?" snorted Indigo. "I can't do nothin' but google my eyes."

Elbow came over and cut the ropes fastening the partners to the saddle. "Git down —march over an' sit agin that log. No—not so clos't together. Yuh might fiddle with t'other's wrist hobbles. Ol' Elbow's still got a lick of sense."

The partners with their hands tightly lashed behind them, sat against the designated log and held their peace. Elbow roamed the small glade impatiently, his head turning to odd angles and every now and then he murmured a garbled phrase to himself. Anything interested him, many objects puzzled him. Once he stooped to the ground and was thus hunched over for a matter of minutes. Then he came toward the partners and swept them with the same sly look they had observed before. The longer he watched the more uneasy he grew, until at last he spoke.

"I don't know you gents."

"Why of course you do," said Joe soothingly. "We've hoisted many a glass at the Dollarhide."

Elbow Jim wrinkled his nose and peered down it somberly. "Ol' Elbow's shore cracked. Once, by Gabriel, there wasn't a man in the county what was able to down me. This was my gang, yuh hear me? Bo Annixter's boss now. Oh, Bo's all right, but he couldn't hold a candle to me. Them dam' hosses."

"Remember the Dollarhide?" persisted Joe.

"I know what I know," mumbled Elbow Jim, and he looked very shrewd.

Joe studied the log casually. "I'm sorter uncomfortable here, Elbow. It's a poor way

to treat an old friend like me. But of course you got orders from Annixter an' I reckon you got to obey 'em——"

"Once I didn't," was Elbow Jim's quick reply. "But I'm out of it now. Yuh don't know Annixter like me. When he's got the bulge he keeps it. I'm kinder sorry for you gents. How'd you git in this scrape?"

He seemed to have lucid moments, moments in which he understood what had taken place. Then quite of a sudden his mind went off the track and he was both puzzled and sly, forgetting what he had said the instant previously. Joe went on. "I'm sittin' on a rock. Got any objections if I move over a little."

"Jus' so's yuh don't git nearer the skinny feller," agreed Elbow Jim.

JOE moved himself in a series of crow-hopping jumps, back all the while touching the log. Indigo's semi-closed eyes flickered with a baleful green light and he utilized Elbow's averted attention to do something with his pinioned hands. Joe's progress put the partners farther apart and made it more difficult for Elbow to keep them within the range of a single glance; nor did Elbow notice that when Joe stopped and leaned on the log he had his back directly against an out-thrust knot with a splintered edge. Joe timed this well. Elbow moved around the glade with a sorry jaded expression on his battered face. The man was in bad shape; fresh blood caked the bandanna on his head.

Joe's body went rigid with effort and his arms snapped powerfully and fell limp as Elbow faced the partners again. "Yuh dunno Annixter. What he's got he keeps. Who're you boys? I'm cracked all right, but I know what I know."

After that he resumed his moody tramping, head swinging with his feet, gun dangling loosely in his fist. The morning wore along, the sun marched upward in the sky, the glade was flooded with a bright hot light. The partners seemed to accept their situation, attempting no more talk; but in those odd intervals when Elbow's attention left them Joe's arms bent outward, twisted and flexed. Beads of sweat crusted his forehead, stolidness touched his eyes—a sure sign that Joe was torturing himself

It was more than an hour—nearer two hours since they had been captured—when they heard a voice sounding far through the trees. Elbow turned his back to the partners and cocked his head. Indigo stirred and looked warningly to Joe; the latter nodded grimly.

"Elbow," he purred, "be a good gent an' roll me a cigareet. Seems like you'd ought to treat an old friend like me better'n this."

Elbow holstered his gun. "I been in the Dollarhide all right." He holstered his gun and went searching for tobacco and papers. Brush rustled nearer, somebody swore Elbow rolled the cigarette with a tantalizing slowness, so slowly that Indigo began to squirm restlessly and Joe struggled to keep a serene countenance. Elbow shambled across the space, the cigarette between outstretched thumb and forefinger. "No monkey business," he warned Joe. "I ain't to be took in nobody's camp. Open yore mouth."

He was within a yard of Joe. The latter tilted his shoulders forward, he had his feet crossed beneath him. As Elbow took the next step Indigo suddenly called out, "Say, Elbow, what's this over here——"

The trick was about to work. Elbow swung. Yet the spring Joe was on the point of making, never materialized; the impulse, swiftly checked, almost carried him over on his face and thus he sat as Shirtsleeve Smith smashed into the glade, raging like a madman.

"Elbow, yuh passed within a foot o' me—an' there was I, stuffed like a turkey! Couldn't talk, couldn't move! I aim to bust somebody's ribs. There yuh be, daggone yore hides! Whicher one manhandled me—whicher one o' yuh gents stuffed all that grass in my gullet? I got a notion to fill yuh full o' pine needles."

"Good mornin', Shirtsleeve," drawled Joe. "Hope you slep' well. How far was you aimin' to trail us last night?"

Shirtsleeve advanced, the horse-jawed countenance crimped in lines of malevolence. "How'd you know I was trailin'?"

"Always been able to smell a skunk," was Joe's deliberate answer.

"Here's where I drum a tune on yore ribs!" snorted Shirtsleeve, and stood directly over Joe.

INDIGO made a noise that was indescribably contemptuous. It pricked Shirtsleeve Smith's vanity as a pin might explode a balloon. He swung toward the small partner, ready to blast him with profanity. Elbow Jim gurgled, but it was then too late. Joe's arms and hands shot out in front of him and his body sunfished through the air, striking Shirtsleeve as a battering ram. Shirtsleeve's angular frame work was too loosely coupled to absorb the impact; every joint in the man snapped, his head flew back and he bent double. Joe's fists struck Shirtsleeve's lantern face twice and the man pitched over. Elbow Jim's gun wavered uncertainly, trying to catch a clear target of Joe. Once more Indigo, who hadn't yet moved, served a useful purpose by yelling at Elbow and thus diverting the injured rustler's attention. It was, however, hardly needed. Joe—the man of leisure, the slow-talking, serene appearing man of the world—exploded like a box of dynamite. Shirtsleeve never had a chance. He was down before he understood what happened; he struggled a little and was battered again. Joe heaved him up and made a shield of him; Joe whipped the gun from the prostrate one's holster and drew a bead on Elbow.

"Drop that piece, Elbow!"

"I got orders——"

"Drop it you crazy loon or yore dead as yesterday!"

The summons cracked over Elbow's head, making him flinch. There he stood, a sorry and troubled figure, fighting off the deadly mists in his brain. He knew he was licked, he knew that for him the days of usefulness were over and that never again would he stand as an equal among other men. Henceforth he would be a chore boy, a half-caste creature to be pitied or laughed at or kicked about; always he would be plagued by that curtain which darkened the brightest day and cut him off from his own past, rising only for an instant—an instant in which, as now, he saw the horror of his case and the utter futility of living.

In this flickering instant of self-knowledge Elbow Jim looked on down the alley of time and found nothing there for him. There was a grain to Elbow, there was pride. Why should he, who had commanded men now sink to the level of a camp dog? One thing he could do. He could carve his own epitaph and let men know that he was master of himself to the very end. So he turned and for a small space looked into the muzzle of Joe Breedlove's gun.

"Drop it," repeated Joe.

Elbow shrugged his shoulders and passed a glance to the still roped Indigo. He could kill Indigo, but if he did the other partner's leveled gun would crash into him before he turned his own weapon inward. And Elbow didn't wish it to be that way. Very slowly the gun in his fist veered and rose. He heard Joe Breedlove's last brittle injunction. And that was the final word that reached him from any mortal. He sent a bullet into his own tortured brain and fell.

"Well, by——" shouted Indigo, startled out of his calm.

Joe's revolver fell and a clucking noise passed his lips. Joe loved his fellow creatures and the sight of this moved him tremendously. "The pore devil—the pore old fella. Well, that's best." He flung up his head, hearing fresh sounds beyond the glade. The main body of rustlers were returning; that shot had warned them and it was only a matter of minutes. "Hustle over here, Indigo!"

Indigo rose and galloped toward his partner. Joe unraveled the knot holding indigo's wrists and transferred the rope to Shirtsleeve's arms. The fellow was not entirely out but there wasn't any resistance in

him. Once more he was a stuffed turkey. Indigo ran over, got the dead Elbow's gun and belt, and collected the horses.

"Them boys will think we killed Elbow," said Indigo, "which impression I hate to have 'em get. This Shirtsleeve guy ain't out of the hop enough to understand."

"Let it ride. Damn the luck, we could've had the drop on that party if they hadn't heard said shot. Now they'll watch for trouble. We've got to sift."

THEY swung up on horses and started through the narrow exit—the same route by which they had come. The rustlers were not in sight but the sound they made indicated an uncomfortable nearness.

"It won't do," muttered Joe. "We've got to make our own trail. Come on."

They turned, recrossed the glade and forced a way through the brush. It was slow, nervous work; within a few minutes Annixter's booming echoes announced the discovery of what had happened. Hard on this came the leader's harsh order. "Spread an' foller. They don't get away, hear it? Knock 'em out o' the saddles! Bring down the hosses. Shouldn't of left Elbow in charge, but I didn't—Shirtsleeve, yuh yella mongrel I got a notion to ride my hoss over yuh! Come on!"

"The boy's full of business," said Joe. "Well, he can't buck this brush any faster'n we do."

"No, but he sounds powerful mean," grumbled Indigo, "and he knows this country a heap better'n us. I'm for makin' a stand on the premises."

They put the worst of the brush behind and arrived at a deer trace dodging along the uneven earth. Joe went before and jockeyed his horse into a respectable run. Overhanging boughs whipped them severely. "How about bitin' back?" persisted Indigo.

The rustlers were in full pursuit; it sounded like a stampede. "What for?" queried Joe. "All we can do is argue an' run some more. I'm awful tired of this deal. My idea is to shuffle the cards again. If we stick here we're liable to be boxed an' licked. Then when it gets dark they'll sashay the stock on over the hump—and what've we got to show for all this sulphur an' brimstone, presumin' such to happen?"

The trace dwindled to nothing, leaving them high and dry in the brush. Once again they bucked through it. The rustlers, taking advantage of the same deer trace, closed the interval. Annixter's violent shout trembled on their ears. "Mac, strike toward the draw! They're headin' for it!"

Indigo grunted. "That's advertisin' for us to stay away from said draw. Well, doggonit, this was yore bright idee in the first place. So get another idee quick or we stop an' argue. I hate to run—it blights my morals scandalous!"

The brush gave way to a more or less open stand of pines; across this they swept. Beyond was a burn with charred snags trooping side by side. On they went, the rustlers seeming to slacken the pace. "Well," decided Joe, "I hate to think of 'em gettin' away with Elkhorn's cows, knowin' what we know. Guess we better swallow some pride an' ride for help."

"Which was my recommend in the beginnin'," jeered Indigo. "It's a hell of a time to be thinkin' of it now. How d'yuh suppose we get outa this wilderness without bein' sniped at?"

The ground began to wrinkle and grow rugged. Ahead they had a vista of lava rock bereft of any kind of foliage. Acres of it, where black pinnacles reared and fell into deep pits. And beyond that at some undetermined distance the ridges dropped into the prairie. The partners had seen the bluffs descending sharply to level ground while riding across country the day before and thus they knew what lay ahead. Heat haze rested on the horizon; three hundred yards farther brought them to a draw sloping down into the prairie. Joe drew rein. He had made up his mind.

"Somebody's got to go down thataway and hit for the Elkhorn. Somebody's got

to stay behind and entertain these gents a few minutes."

"That." declared Indigo with alacrity, "is my job." The wizened face flared with the only emotion it was capable of expressing, a grim and embattled pleasure; those washed blue eyes flickered, changing to an emerald green. "You travel. I'll stop 'em long enough to let yuh get a good start. Then I'll work back into the rocks an' pick my teeth."

"Pick lead from yore ears, you mean," muttered Joe. "They'll try to rub you out." His hand ripped at the buckle of his gun-belt; he flung the belt and revolver across Indigo's saddle. "You need this too."

"How about you?" protested Indigo.

"I'm runnin', not fightin'," was Joe's answer.

FOR an instant the partners studied each other. It was one of the few times in their joint career they had separated during trouble and it left both uneasy. Together they made a formidable, efficient machine. Asunder they were lost, like man and wife divorced. Yet there was nothing either could say at such a juncture for they were not made to say pretty sentiments. So Joe shrugged his shoulders and turned into the draw. "Be good, kid. I'll hustle back."

"Uhuh," grunted Indigo, watching his partner go. "Don't rush. I'll say I earned this fun an' they ain't no use cuttin' it short."

Joe dipped around a point of brush and was lost save for the clatter made by his pony's hoofs. And that scarce had died when Indigo flung himself into the draw and crawled up the far side. Here was a fine breastwork of rock. Back of him were other equally good shelters in case he had to retreat. He jumped from the saddle, shying his horse into an adjacent pit, and settled to his haunches.

Annixter's men raised a great noise as they came. The chase had grown so hot that it made them careless for they plunged out of the concealing undergrowth and through the straggling pines with no side survey, no flanking forays. Annixter's eyes were pinned to the fugitive tracks; up to the edge of the draw they swept and halted. Annixter stood in his stirrups, looking down the draw; his arm made a semi-circular gesture and the rest of the riders closed toward him. There were six of them besides Annixter, and Indigo, raising his gun, admitted he had at last matched himself against superior odds. For Indigo that was a tremendous concession.

"One set of tracks goes down there," said Shirtsleeve Smith, indicating the draw. "Other gent has hit for the lava rock."

"Prob'ly jus' to throw us off," snapped Annixter. "They're both foggin' for open country, you bet. Back to Elkhorn, the dam' spies. Come on. If they reach help we might as well quit business."

"Don't be in no rush," sang out Indigo and placed a bullet just short of Annixter's horse. The distance made accurate revolver work out of the question, but all Indigo cared about right at present was to announce himself and keep the party occupied. The compact formation around Annixter was scattered instantly, as if a bomb had fallen in the center. Dust rose, men streamed back, spreading out. Annixter's voice rose again, though not loud enough for the intrenched Indigo to make out just what the man was saying. It didn't matter, however, for the small one's glittering green eyes saw them charge through the trees and momentarily disappear in the direction of the draw's head. That was clear enough; they meant to flank and surround him.

Indigo muttered wrathfully, "why don't they fight in the open?" and took steps to remove himself from the immediate area. The horse was no good to him out here where a yard of level ground ended in a forty yard crater or an immense monolith. Regretfully he left the pony and struck straight on toward the end of the ridge. "When a man's got to take to his own locomotion," he soliloquized, "the situation ain't bright. Anyhow, Joe's clear an' safe."

INDIGO stood behind a rock shelf and watched a row of sombreros bob toward him, over on his left hand, a hundred yards away. The outlaws had deserted their horses likewise, which for a brief spell gave him the audacious idea of slipping across the draw and stealing the animals. He counted the hats and immediately decided not to be foolish; there were only five in pursuit. Evidently Annixter held a man in reserve—perhaps sent him on Joe's trail. Anyhow, it wasn't wise to buck into uncertainty. So he retreated again, keeping well out of sight. Once a burst of shots broke the silence and the lead slugs spattered an adjacent lava formation. Indigo derisively wrinkled his nose and made an insulting noise. They didn't know exactly where he was, therefore they prospected. But Indigo had cut his wisdom teeth in trouble and he wasn't to be tricked like that.

He crawled up and he slid down; he rolled over, he rested and he traveled again. The sun bit into the back of his neck and the lava rock was as sharp as broken glass. He began to sweat and at that point he realized he was going to be intolerably thirsty before this day's work was ended. Right there Indigo's wrath exploded sulphurically and all the rustlers' ancestors suffered blighting comparisons. Indigo was a man who could endure all sorts of hardship and privation willingly and cheerfully, provided he did it of his own accord. But the fact was, right now, he was being driven by a collection of mangy, louse-infested, mutton-eaters and it hurt his pride to think they were the cause of all this misery. He very nearly rose up from his concealment and challenged them. Some divine angel saved Indigo from his own impulse that time, or perhaps long association with Joe Breedlove had instilled a little caution in him. He kept on. And the farther he went the narrower the ridge became. Nothing was to be seen of the rustlers. Ominous quiet held the flickering heat haze.

Twenty yards brought him to the end of his trail. He climbed the side of another huge bowl, hooked his chin over the rim and found himself staring down a matter of four hundred feet to the prairie floor. It wasn't a sheer drop, but it was abrupt enough to bar Indigo from going farther. "A centipede would shore bust his laigs goin' down that," he grunted. "Here's where we fort up."

The idea of having so much space behind him didn't suit Indigo very well. It absolutely cut off his retreat, it made this argument a last ditch affair. So he returned several yards and settled behind a pinnacle, from which he ran three small alleys. Any of them, in case of emergency, provided him with a graceful exit. The only trouble was that it left his rear open to attack. Indigo turned it over in his head and ended by going back to the very edge of the bluff. "Why do things by half? If I got to die, I got to die." With that fatalistic decision he settled himself against the most comfortable slab of lava he could find and prepared for a stormy afternoon. His pale green orbs darted across the tortured surface, seeking sign of the party, and for want of a better thing to do he emptied half a sack of cigarette tobacco in his mouth and chewed doggedly.

"Joe," he muttered, "ought to be half way to Elkhorn by now. Hope he don't take my advice too literal about not hurryin'."

FURTHER soliloquy was abruptly terminated by the sight of a hat rising fifty yards on the right—rising and falling. Indigo fastened his attention upon it until something brushed his vision at the extreme left. Another hat. They had spread out and were sweeping the ridge top as they came. "Too thorough about it, daggone 'em," swore Indigo. He drew both guns and laid them over his parapet, grimly waiting. No more hats appeared for a little while and Indigo judged they had only been exposed to draw fire, thus identifying his location. "A barkin' dawg don't bite. Me, I ain't droppin'

the hammer till I see solid flesh."

There was the faintest of sounds behind and Indigo whirled about like a tiger at bay. Down in the pit of the hollow crawled a horned toad, disturbed out of his customary somnolence. Indigo, whose nerves had been touched, cussed the toad with a roundness that would have shamed a mule skinner. The toad, hearing all this reproach, skittered off. Indigo dropped his hat over the creature. "Daggone you, Oscar, what's the idee o' scarin' a gent like that? Thought somebody had clumb up behind."

The toad thumped the hat brim by way of reply. Indigo took another glance over his parapet and reached in his pocket for a piece of string. "No you don't, Oscar. Now that yuh come I reckon yuh might as well keep me company. We're goin' to see things which shore will broaden yore eddication." He slipped his hand beneath the hat and took the toad. Out came Oscar, blinking in the light, the skin beneath his throat rising and falling. Indigo threw a loop around the animal's barbed surface, laid him on the rocks and secured the string's far end beneath a loose lump of lava. Oscar was thus picketed.

"First off, Oscar," advised Indigo, "yore a livin' witness that a man can spit four hundred linear feet. It ain't a clean habit, Oscar. Wouldn't never advise yuh to chew. Wimmen don't like it. Now watch this." Indigo craned his neck over the bluff's edge and spat outward into space; for a moment he laid thus, as if waiting for an echo of the far off impact to return. Oscar walked out to the end of his tether and fell on his back, thus blinding himself to the record breaking feat. Indigo grunted. "Jus' like any other fool. Never go against the rope, Oscar."

The wizened one took another survey of the broken ground. Somebody ducked behind a hummock of lava. He heard a short signal and braced himself as five of the party popped into view and came forward on the run. Lead smashed against his parapet, splinters of rock struck his face. He took aim at the nearest and fired. The five dropped instantly. Another bullet sang above him, seeming to come from a different angle and before he had a chance to scout the area again a steady barrage played against his defense. He couldn't raise his head to see what went on, but he heard Annixter telling the rest of the rustlers to keep up the shooting and right after that he heard boots scuffing across the jagged surface. They were keeping him smothered and closing the gap.

Indigo gripped both guns in his fist and waited. "Oscar, it'll be over in a minute. This life is hell on frawgs." Reaching over he slipped the noose from the creature's neck. "You better hit for shelter." Annixter's sharp command penetrated the still air; they were not more than fifteen yards away.

Chapter IV

TROUBLE BREEDS TROUBLE

JOE swept out of the draw and across the prairie as fast as the horse would take him. He thought he heard the reverberation of pursuit down the draw, but after he got a quarter mile away from the ridge he looked back and found no one behind. That encouraged him, as well as discouraged him. His own safety was assured; Indigo's was only made the more uncertain. One thing he knew very well—the rustlers would bend every effort to capture or kill Indigo. Otherwise they were betrayed and their activities in the country were necessarily at an end.

"Should be somebody foggin' after me," he murmured to himself. "Unless they think we're both holed up in the lava. Somebody must've seen my tracks headin' down the draw."

But there was nobody behind, not even as the bluffs grew dim behind the haze and at that point he decided the rustlers had figured his tracks to be only a blind. It was queer, too, they couldn't spot him out in the level ground from their vantage point. It must be they had their heads pretty close to

the lava. The thought made him grin wryly. "Indigo'll see they don't stand very high in the air."

After that he discarded these speculations and took to nursing speed out of the pony. About forty-five minutes later he stopped the lathered, exhausted animal in front of the Elkhorn porch and dropped out of the saddle.

Stovall was in his accustomed chair. He saw the girl Julie hurrying through the house toward the door. And before he could say anything the young foreman, Slip, popped around the corner at a run. "What's up?" he demanded.

Stovall motioned the foreman to be silent, the ruddy face turning a deeper red. "Slip, ain't you learned politeness yet? Dammit, a man'd think you was a pilgrim in the country. Julie—Julie!"

"Yes, dad." The girl was framed in the doorway, looking curiously at Joe. The silver-haired puncher removed his hat and ducked his head.

"Get the man a drink. Step to the porch, sir, an' take a seat. It's another hot day."

"Why, I'd reckon it was," agreed Joe. Time pressed, but he was an old hand and he recognized Stovall's ingrained courtesy. The West changed and grew away from men like the Elkhorn owner; folks put less faith in the ancient etiquette, but Stovall kept to it while the youthful foreman simmered and looked dourly on. The girl returned with a brimming dipper and a flashing smile. Joe drank.

"I'll be thankin' you, ma'am," said he, returning the dipper. The foreman stirred angrily as he watched the two of them stand so near together and for the moment so oblivious to all other things.

"Yore horse needs rest," suggested Stovall, "better lay over."

Joe heard in this an invitation to speak his piece. So he came directly to the issue, talking in slow, clipped words. "My partner and I was ridin' south yesterday. I guess you understand that we been trained to mind our own business, no matter what happens."

"Knew it when I saw you," interrupted Stovall. "Know a old hand when I see one. About gone from the country now."

"What's all this parley about?" grunted Slip.

Joe proceeded as if he hadn't heard the young foreman. "Accidental, the other night we struck a party that mistook us for somebody else. They spilled the beans. A matter of rustlin' some cows. I'll just say that we knew yore stock was to be rustled. We knew it when we came past yore place."

The young foreman pointed an accusing finger. "Then why didn't you say something? That's a pretty kind of talk to spill now!"

Joe was looking at Stovall, almost apologetically. "I was hopin' you'd ketch on to my last remark. We been taught to mind our own business strictly."

STOVALL'S ruddy face lost some of its color and the coal black eyes snapped. Julie had retreated to the doorway and had her attention riveted on Joe "I was raised in the same school myself," said Stovall, quietly. "I've seen men killed for not keepin' out o' what wasn't their affair. You got nothin' to be sorry about."

"Well," went on Joe, still more apologetically, "when my partner an' I rode away from here we—well, we figgered it wasn't exactly right. So, not bein' able to squeal, an' yet knowin' what we did know, we decided to go back an' see the thing through. Aim was to throw in with the rustler gents an' later run yore stuff back on the range without sayin' anything to anybody. Point is, we was mistook by said parties for a couple northern rustlers who was to take yore stock an' fog it over the line. That's how we could swing the deal without a fight, or without blabbin'."

"Go ahead," said Stovall, with hardly any emotion in his words.

Joe turned to the girl. She nodded imperceptibly and seemed to withdraw still farther into the house. "It didn't work out," finished Joe. "Trouble. Real rustlers from

the north turned up. My partner is barricaded up in the lava an' yore critters are hid somewhere along the pass. That's why I'm here. If it was only a matter of me an' Indigo I wouldn't bother you folks. But you stand to lose some cows."

The young foreman erupted disbelief. "I didn't like the way you fellows drifted in the last time. Didn't believe what you said. Don't believe it now. Sounds to me like yo're a couple of highbinders that got pinched an' now you're yelpin' for help. All this high an' mighty talk about not wantin' to squeal——"

Julie spoke for the first time. "Slip, stop that."

The foreman threw up his flushed face and stared at her in astonishment. "Listen, Julie, I'm responsible for this ranch and I can't go swallowin' a lot of honky——"

"Be quiet, Slip," said she.

"Is it his word over mine, then?" cried Slip.

"Don't you know an honest man by sight, Slip?" she asked him. And when Joe turned to watch her she was gone from the doorway.

Stovall's hands plucked at his blanket, and if ever a man struggled with a desire it was the Elkhorn owner. There was something so passionately wistful in the old man's face that Joe dropped his head. Stovall gave his foreman abrupt orders. "Call out the crew. Saddle this gentleman another horse."

"To ram ourself into hot lead an' a trap?" asked Slip.

"Do as I say, Slip. Hustle it."

The foreman retreated, calling to the crew. Joe rolled a cigarette, still feeling the necessity of an apology. "Reckon we made a mess of it all around. Either should of stayed out altogether or went in altogether."

"It reminds me——" began Stovall. He never finished that sentence, seeming to be lost in his past. A little later a slow grin spread over his ruddy features. "Hell of a way for a ranchman to take bad news, ain't it? You'd think I ought to be sore. But it's been so long since I saw anybody gallop up on a lathered brute that it sorter takes me back. Can you lick 'em with my boys?"

"I reckon," was Joe's brief answer.

"I'd give every red cent I own to go along," said Stovall, and the grin disappeared. "I don't believe you give me a name, cowboy."

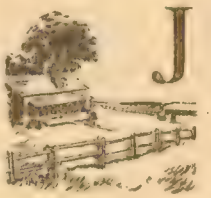
"Joe Breedlove," said the tall one. "Happens to be my true name."

"Any name would've done," was Stovall's quick response. "Well, Whitey, you and yore partner have got a job here any time. Think it over."

The foreman rode around the house with a quartette of Elkhorn men behind him and an extra pony. Joe climbed up, nodding at the surly Slip. Stovall's black eyes held a glitter as he gave his last order to the youth. "Now, yo're takin' instructions from Whitey on this party. What he says goes. Hear it?"

"You're the boss," grunted Slip.

"You bet," snorted Stovall. "Ride!"



JOE swung away. Just as he reached the crest of a small ridge he turned to catch another look of the Elkhorn house. Stovall gripped the arms of his chair, trying to rise; and beside him was the girl, her hand above her eyes. It rose to him, and fell. The youthful foreman caught that gesture and he pushed his mount alongside Joe's angrily. "Who the hell are you, anyhow, to come here an' mislead folks? I'll play this game, fella, but you bet I'm protectin' the Stovalls. Leave yore betters alone."

Joe shook his head. "I know jus' how you feel, Slip," said he, gently "I had a girl, too, when I was yore age."

"Keep her off yore tongue!" snapped the young foreman. "An' if yo're any man a-tall, don't play ducks an' drakes with a good family."

Joe held his peace. The young fellow was all right, he was doing the best he could and he didn't really mean to pass the boundary of politeness. An older head might have understood, but Slip was very young and he felt his responsibilities. So Joe made

the proper allowances, sympathizing with the man, yet all the while remembering Julie Stovall's gray eyes, and the smile she had given him. "It'd be a dreary world without a woman," he murmured to himself. "Wonder what Indigo'd think about workin' on the Elkhorn?"

"What was that?" asked the foreman.

"Bear a little left," said Joe.

Nothing more was said for a half-hour. The ridge stood clearer through the haze and the sheer bluffs at the western extremity began to show their ochre and black coloring. Joe followed the trail he had made earlier, a trail that led them directly toward the draw. A mile or two from the draw's entrance he began to debate the advisability of circling and entering the rugged land by the timbered half. He dismissed the move as a time waster. If Annixter's bunch were on the lookout they would see this party crossing the open land and prepare accordingly. Best to strike up the draw and take what came. He announced this decision to young Slip. The foreman, stirred by the proximity of a pitched battle, forgot his resentment and his suspicions.

"Where's yore partner?"

"Corraled somewhere in the lava."

"It's been near two hours, ain't it?" wondered young Slip. "Which is a pretty long time for one man to stand off five-six. Say, what gang is this? You ain't told me yet."

"Annixter's."

"The hell! Say, yore partner's out of luck by this time."

Joe turned on Slip with a swift, brittle retort. "They don't grow Indigo's kind down here, my boy. Don't feel bereaved none till you see him dead."

"Well, what's the play to be?"

"Bust into 'em when we see the color of their whiskers. Look sharp. Spread out a little. If there's any dickerin', I'll do it. But don't go to sleep in the saddle meanwhile Pick a man an' keep yore eyes on him. Up we go."

They reached the draw's mouth and threaded its tortuous course. It narrowed and grew steep; rocks went clattering down the slope behind. Somewhere was a single shot followed by silence. "Hustle it!" snapped Joe. "They ain't had sense enough to quit foolin' with Indigo yet."

The draw swooped along a final sharp grade and brought them to the exact point the partners had parted earlier in the day. Joe dropped to the ground and ran up to where he commanded a view of the lava bed. Another shot blasted the sultry stillness.

"They're givin' it up. Comin' back. Ain't seen us yet. Spread along the ground. Wait till I give the word!" whispered Joe.

THE Elkhorn punchers flung themselves against the earth at wide intervals. Joe plastered himself at the draw's rim, peering between boulders. Annixter's men came back, threading the lava pits, ducking in and out of view. There were five of them and Joe, casting up the account, wondered what had happened to the other one. Back watching the rustled stock, or dead by Indigo's gun. Well, it would soon be discovered. Another shot cracked across the barren strip and Annixter's men sank momentarily down, turning away from the hidden Elkhorn party. Joe's heart swelled a little and he felt like shouting; for Indigo's warped and wiry figure popped out of a depression seventy yards beyond the rustlers and waved his gun in a plain invitation for them to return and fight. It was beyond any decent gun range but the rustlers opened fire. Indigo waggled his thumb and fingers in a ribald manner; his yell split the air. Then he sank back. The rustlers took up the retreat once more. Annixter's heavy voice rose blasphemously, no more than fifty feet distant. Joe waited another dragging minute, feet doubling beneath him. His Stetson bobbed toward the Elkhorn boys. Together they sprang up and faced Annixter's crew.

"Up with 'em!" snapped Joe. "No parley! Up with the flippers! First man moves is first man dead!"

The rustlers stopped in their tracks, completely taken off guard. Annixter's russet

beard flamed in the sun, his body weaved forward and back as if he gathered momentum for the draw. For the rest of the party surrender came quickly. One by one hands rose. But Annixter looked directly at Joe Breedlove, weighing the silver-haired partner with a long, harsh glance. The power of it was like a rifle bullet and when he spoke, arms still at his sides, the somber, scornful words augured the danger in him.

"Thought you was back there behind the rocks, hombre. I ain't givin' in easy. Make it a fair deal. Drop yore gun an' we'll hit for the draw."

Joe shook his head. "I cut my wisdoms long time ago, Annixter. Why should I swap shots now? Ain't after yore hide. Up with the flippers."

"Yuh rat! They ain't nothin' lower'n a sneakin' spy like you. Somebody'll tear the liver out o' yore ribs one o' these fine days. And it'll be Bo Annixter. Mind that."

"Up with the flippers," droned Joe.

Annixter gave in. The Elkhorn boys moved on, disarmed the trapped ones, and herded them into the draw. Joe circled Annixter before lifting the rustler's gun; then his arms felt along the man's ribs. "Stinger's drawn, Slip. Take him away."

Indigo came across the lava casually, a cigarette drooping in his lips. And from the disillusion on his face, the weary carriage of his shoulders and the expressionless cast of his washed blue eyes he seemed to tell the disordered universe that it was just another bad day.

"Well, Joe."

"Well, Indigo."

"Back again, uh? Must've hurried."

"Oh, so-so. Any trouble."

"Not much. They rushed me. One of 'em out there. Not defunct, but harmless." Then a small gleam of interest came to the dyspeptic countenance. "Say, I spit four hundred feet. Tie that."

Joe grinned. "Didn't think it was that far down the bluff side."

"Hell," grunted Indigo, "I thought mebbe you'd bite. Reckon I'll spend the rest o' my life tryin' to convince folks. Well, what next?"

THE partners returned to the bluff's rim and picked up the wounded rustler. It was Shirtsleeve Smith and the man was in poor shape. They lugged him back to the draw where the Elkhorn bunch had tied the prisoners into the saddles. Shirtsleeves was likewise lashed; they were ready for the trip home.

"Listen," growled Annixter to the Elkhorn foreman. "I didn't know yuh had these fellas on yore payroll."

"They ain't," explained Slip. "Strangers to me."

Annixter exploded in Joe's face. "Why, yuh damn' crooks! So yuh was jus' stealin' from me, huh? Wanted to let us get the blame for rustlin' while you piked off with 'em!"

"What's that?" asked the youthful foreman, growing suspicious again.

"A couple of sagebrush tinhorns!" snorted Annixter "Without guts enough to steal their own cows so they double-cross me! Listen, you two. I'll live to tear yore livers out! Mind that—an' I'll see yuh roast in hell for killin' pore old Elbow——"

The youthful foreman dropped his head; the next moment both partners were covered with the Elkhorn guns. Slip's countenance blazed with suspicion. "It's what I thought all the time. Your scheme didn't work an' yuh got in a jackpot, so yuh crawls to the old man for help. I thought so. Stretch 'em elbows."

Indigo was on the verge of an explosion. Joe stilled him with a sof tword and met the irate Slip's glance. "Son," he murmured, "is that all you've got in yore head?" The mildness and the serenity of a summer's morning rested upon the tall one's face. At the moment he seemed as if he were giving the young foreman fatherly advice; the hazel eyes beamed gently.

"Keep yore dirty tongue off——" began Slip, and checked himself. "Put up yore hands."

Indigo exploded. "What's yore itch, yuh bottle-fed crib sucker?"

"You'll itch in jail," retorted Slip. "Hands up. You'll never dirty Elkhorn again."

Indigo looked to Joe, the tall partner nodded back, raising his arms. "All right. It won't be long." He smiled at Slip. "Human nature is a big book. Read it sometime. We won't be in the lockup more'n two hours. Let's go."

Slip turned to Annixter. "Where's the critters?"

"Find 'em," muttered Annixter. "Well—north o' the pass. Elbow's down that trail, too. Take care o' him."

Slip nodded to one of his men. "That's yore job." The rest of the riders gathered behind the prisoners and pushed them down the draw. At dusk they reached town. The sheriff put Annixter's bunch in one cell and the partners in another. The Elkhorn men went home.

"YORE prediction," said Indigo, three hours later, "is no good. Here's the finish o' a good impulse. Next time yuh desire to help anybody, strangle the idee. Stomp on it. Ain't yuh discovered yet they's nothin' meaner in this world than human nature?"

Joe rolled a cigarette It was dark in the cell and a brooding silence pervaded the jail. Through the barred window they saw the yellow lamplight twinkling out of a saloon opposite; boots scraped across the town walk and soft speech floated upward. Joe's match wavered in the gloom and went out, but by the moment's illumination Indigo saw his partner smiling. "Some people is bad, some is good," he murmured. "But most of us is half an' half, which makes life interestin'. Annixter, now, is all bad—or as near to it as anybody could get. The young foreman fella is fifty-fifty. He's got a good heart an' sound impulses but he lets his temper get the best o' him. As for the——"

"Yeah," Jeered Indigo, "go ahead an' tell me somebody all to the good."

"The girl," said Joe, just above a whisper. His cigarette tip gleamed brightly.

Indigo moved uneasily. "Well, I think we're the singed ducks, m'self. That sheriff, they say, is desirous o' makin' a record. Oh, we'll get ample. Wonder how foolproof this mantrap is?"

"Won't be very long now," drawled Joe.

"What makes yuh so all-fired certain?" asked Indigo, irritably.

"I know. Say, Indigo, how would you like to hire out again?"

Indigo was silent for a long spell. He knew what was coming, he had seen the portents in the sky some time before. It dragged on his spirits, made him weary and depressed. "Who to?"

Joe's answer was too casual. "Oh, we got an invite to work for Elkhorn. Seems to me maybe we've done drifted plenty long. Don't it strike you like that, Indigo?"

Indigo merely grunted. Joe squinted through the darkness and found his partner humped over on the bunk's edge. Indigo always carried himself as if he was sick of the works of creation, but even through the shadows Joe sensed a difference and it made him thoughtful. He forebore pressing the matter.

Boots shuffled up the stairway and a key scraped the lock. The sheriff issued a reluctant invitation. "Come on out, you buzzards. The Elkhorn got soft-hearted an' they ain't makin' no charges. Personal, I'd like to see you get justice."

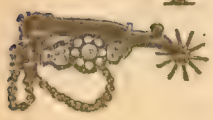
"Justice," drawled Joe, rising, "is a mighty word. An' it has many meanin's, sher'ff. Which meanin' was you alludin' to?"

The sheriff grunted. Indigo and Joe passed down the stairs to the office and found Slip, the young foreman, waiting for them. He had his hat off and the light glimmered along his curly hair. He was a good looking youngster, Joe decided. And at present he met Joe's eyes with a straight, frank glance. "Listen," said he, "I guess I got off on the wrong foot. Got the hell bawled out of me by the old man an' Julie. That's why I'm back. Mebbe you're off me permanent, but I jus' want you to know that I'd cut off my hands for Elkhorn an' the

folks on it. Give 'em their guns, Sher'ff."

Joe was smiling, the sweet and twisted smile that was so much a part of him. He put out his hand. "I was young once, Slip," he murmured. "Don't I know how it feels? Once I had a girl——"

"I'm out of it I reckon," interrupted young Slip, gruffly. His eyes dropped as if to conceal some betraying emotion. When he raised his head again he had set his face as tight as he could. "They want you to come back. The old man—and Julie. Let's go outside."



THE partners crossed the threshold. There was a rig standing in front of the jail and Julie Stovall sat in the driver's seat, waiting. Her face was in the shadows and Joe couldn't see her eyes, but her words tinkled across the interval like the notes of a flute. "We're sorry. All of us. So is Slip. Slip has always fought so hard for us. We want you to come back. I—I hope you will."

"I'll go get the hosses," muttered Indigo, and went away. He stumbled on a plank and swore bitterly. And at the stable he saddled both horses in a kind of blind fury. The stableman started to talk. Indigo flared up. "Shut yore mouth, yuh galoot!" out he rode, leading Joe's pony. "I can see the end right now," he grunted. "Joe in harness. Hell! Me——"

He arrived at the buggy. Joe mounted and the three men followed the rig out of town and along the road to the Elkhorn. There was a soft breeze bringing up the aroma of the desert and the moon hung on the horizon like a Hallowe'en lantern. The lights of town faded, the horses' hoofs made a lulling rhythm on the hard-packed road. Joe touched his partner's arm—a rare thing for him. "It's all right with you, Indigo? It's O. K?"

"I reckon," grunted Indigo and said no more. They crossed a creek and ran onward through the night. Slip, the foreman, muttered something and spurred ahead of the party. They wheeled around an area of boulders and took a short climb. Of a sudden Indigo took up the slack in his reins and halted. "I forgot somethin' in town, Joe. You go on. See yuh later."

"What——" began Joe, likewise stopping. But Indigo never answered. He was fifty feet away, traveling like a crazy man. The horse began to pitch and Indigo discovered he was sinking his spurs deep into the brute's flanks.

"It's the end," muttered Indigo, looking up to the black sky. "Yeah. Fare-you-well to old times. Joe's got a girl an' Indigo rides alone from now on. Hell!"

He was not an imaginative man, this warped and pessimistic and morose rider of the range; he was not one to nourish regrets for a lost past, he seldom ever found himself lifted in anticipation for the future. But tonight marked a milestone in his life, tonight was the forking of one more trail and down one of those trails he had to ride alone. Ride alone on into the southern horizon. All roads had an ending, all men came to the great divide and crossed into the misty land. Well, that didn't matter. But it would be lonely without Joe. How many a mile had they traversed, side by side? How many a campfire had they built together, how many a fight had they seen to a good ending? They were partners who knew each other so well that they understood the twist of each gesture, the inflection of each syllable. It would be a drab journey without Joe. A drab journey into the horizon to nowhere.

"Why should I stick on the ranch an' see him slip into double harness?" he muttered fiercely. "The time had to come, sooner or later, but why should I hang around an' see him swap to another partner? It had to be done—in a hurry. They's got to be an end an' this is it."

The lights of town blinked across the land. Indigo shook his head. "I ain't shore about Joe an' that girl. Well, I know what she sees in him. Any woman ought to be proud o' Joe. Lots of 'em have looked twice an' wished. Yeah. But Joe's thirty-five an' she's no more'n twenty. When he's fifty

she's thirty-five. Well? I ain't shore Joe'll like double rig an' a fenced pasture. Slip, now, is her age, he's honin' for the girl. They're a matched pair."

Indigo was a realist. And he knew that save for Joe's arrival Julie Stovall would probably have married Slip. Things happened that way. And they were a matched pair. What she saw in Joe Breedlove was the same thing other women and men saw in the silver-haired one. Joe brought a touch of mystery with him and a touch of romance. He was handsome and when he smiled the love of life sprang across his face, to weld others to him. He was a mature man; the gods had been kind to Joe.

"Yeah, she'd married Slip. Slip's young an' still flighty. But he's got the makin's of a good fella. She owns him, an' she knows it. Didn't I see her look at him once? They'd make a matched team. I ain't shore about her an' Joe. By God, why has things got to be thataway? It ain't a fair swap. Joe's got a long trail behind an' they was another girl way back."

On the edge of town he made one more observation. "If she lost him she'd get over it."

HE DROPPED the reins over a hitching rack and wandered into the saloon. The lights blinded his eyes and he blinked around at the scattering crowd, the washed blue orbs plainly hostile, plainly threatening. At the counter he raised his fingers to the barkeep. The barkeep slid a bottle and glass toward Indigo, saying:

"It's a fine night, partner."

"The hell it is," snapped Indigo. He took the bottle and glass to a corner table and sat down. For some time he looked into the amber liquid as if seeing a great many pictures there. Then he poured, raised the glass and saluted the wall. "Here's to yuh, kid. Won't see yore kind again. Old Indigo rides solitaire from now on."

The trail ahead would be across the same old desolate prairie, the night fire would be by the same barren pines. And somewhere beyond the heat haze there would be an end. "Me," muttered Indigo, "I'm goin' to get so drunk tonight a hog wouldn't sleep in the same bed. Good bye, kid."

He drank. He drank again. Chips clattered at an adjacent table. Somebody called to him, inviting him to take a hand. Indigo half turned and the frigid blue eyes devastated the players. "Mind yore own business," grunted Indigo, and poured himself another glass.

He had his back to the door and therefore didn't see a tall man sweep through and in. Didn't see him sweep the room and then walk toward the corner. But he heard a familiar voice call his name roughly and before he could look up he saw a bronzed fist flash across the table and knock bottle and glass to the floor. Joe Breedlove towered over him; all the humor and all the serenity was gone and in its stead was a tight, bleak bitterness. Joe looked old at that moment, shockingly old and tired. And he stared at Indigo as if the latter were a complete stranger.

"What the hell are yuh doin' here?" he demanded. "Guzzlin' like an' old soak. Get up from there. We're ridin' tonight."

"Where?"

"South," muttered Joe. "Come on."

They went out, with the crowd watching, and they climbed up to the saddles and turned through the street, heading south, away from town, away from Elkhorn. Taking up the pilgrimage that had been interrupted the last few days. And some time later in the night when the lights no longer winked at them and the stark shadows wrapped around them, Joe spoke.

"It jus' wouldn't stick, Indigo. I ain't her kind. By God, I ain't! If ever she thought so, she'll change her mind later when she marries Slip."

Indigo was shrewd. He held his tongue. And if he had spoken, the thing he had on his mind would have seemed so completely foreign to his nature that Joe Breedlove would never have believed it. But Indigo, looking up to the stars, found the world good.

LIGHT DUTY

By L. PATRICK GREENE

Author of "Get That Headhunter!" "Counterfeit Trails," etc.

When Trooper "Dynamite" Drury of the B.S.A.P. set forth on his tour of light duty, he little dreamt what lay in store for him. Nor, as he rode through the quiet Rhodesian veldt, did he know that under his very nose a fiendish crime was in the making!

SERGEANT - MAJOR BOWEN looked irritably at the tall trooper who lounged nonchalantly against the side of the *kyah*.

"My God, Drury," he rasped, "I know you've just come out of hospital—but that's no excuse for you looking like a B. D. S."*

Trooper Drury grinned.

"It's the way I'm made, Sergeant Major, sir," he drawled, and there was a tang of Texas in his voice. "My old man had me ridin' a barrel afore I could walk an' I was forking a bronco afore most kids have cut their teeth—"

"Oh, cut it short, the sergeant-major interrupted. "I wasn't referring to your good looks—or lack of 'em. I was talking about—But hell! What's the good. You've always been a dirty soldier; you always will be. But you happen to be a sort of hard case Sherlock Holmes an' so I suppose the B. S. A. P.'ll have to put up with you an' make allowances."

The sergeant-major snorted indignantly. Trooper Dynamite Drury's lack of military smartness was a constant irritation to him. Just the same he was fully conscious of the fact that Drury was one of the most

* B. D. S.—British Destitute Subject.

valuable members of the force and his voice softened somewhat as he continued, "But how do you feel?"

"A bit tottery—fever sure does take it out of a man. Why?"

"You're down for light duty, aren't you?"

"Yep! Got a job of work?"

"Nothing in the special duty line, Drury. But I thought you might like to go on Commonage Patrol. Just a nice little ride around. Nothing to do. Take your own time. And if you call at Brabson's—they'll give you a good lunch.

"Of course you needn't go if you don't feel like it. But all the other duty men are out. And——"

"Sure—I'll go. There's nothing to it, is there? I just call on folks who live 'round about, get 'em to sign the Commonage book an' ask if there's any complaints. That's all there is to it—ain't it?"

The sergeant-major nodded.

"That's all. You might get a complaint or two of chicken stealing, or of niggers being saucy—nothing to worry about. It'll be a nice little ride. And, I say—if you go to Brabsons—and they always feed the police well—you might give Miss Brabson this note. And you needn't make a show about it either."

Drury chuckled.

"I reckon you're sending me on a Cupid's Patrol, sergeant-major, sir. Well—that's light duty, sure enough. Hand over the billey doux!"

IT WAS nearing sundown when Drury turned his horse's head toward the *dorp,* seven miles distant. He had had a long day—but one which had filled him with a sense of well-being and utter contentment. For this day, Africa had been at her best. The heat had been tempered by a gentle breeze and Drury had drowsed in the saddle, permitting his horse to choose its own gait and its own course.

It had been a clean, health-restoring day; Drury's fever-thinned blood seemed to respond to the freshness of the veldt air and the sweet tang of *mapani* bush.

Everything had been conducive to Drury's ease of mind and body. The natives he had met, trekking to their kraals, had been dutifully respectful—with many of them he had exchanged greetings and had gossiped idly, surprising them with his knowledge of the vernacular. And at the homesteads he had visited, Drury had been received with a true Rhodesian hospitality by keen-eyed, sun-bronzed men and women. The men at one homestead—that of the Brabsons—were having a friendly shooting match when he arrived. Good shots, all of them, they were Drury's equal at a stationary target but he made them gasp with astonishment at his snap shooting and the speed of his draw.

They fed him well with delicacies unheard of in the police mess; they gasped at his capacity for holding liquor and they begged him to get a month's sick leave and go on a hunting trip with them.

"Yep!" he now muttered sleepily. "It's sure been a nice peaceful day. No worry, no noise—nothing. An' them fellers at Brabsons'—good guys all of 'em.

"Reckon I'm goin' to apply for sick leave an' go a-huntin' with them. Sure. Don't see why not. I'm a sick man I am!" He chuckled merrily, then groaned lugubriously adding in a mock tone of despair; "Sure I'm weaker'n a cat. Ain't I just come out of hospital? Ain't I had a bad attack of malaria? Sure I have. Well then!"

He rode on for a while in silence. The sun had set and the veldt was bathed in the crimson light of its afterglow. The air had perceptibly cooled.

"Better hurry," decided Drury. "Doc said I wasn't to be out after sundown. Might bring on fever again. Guess he was just talking. Hell! Never felt so well in my life."

He yawned and stretched himself luxuriously.

Then he added with a grin, "Just the same, I'm going to be blame sick in the morning. You betcha!"

He yawned again:

"Reckon I'll sleep sound tonight," he observed. "It's been such a damn restful day."

HE TIGHTENED his grip on the reins, intending to finish his day's light duty with a fast canter back to the police camp through the swift gathering darkness.

Then he tensed. His supernaturally keen ears detected the rapid patter of a horse's hard hoofs on the dirt road. He drew his horse to a halt and sat waiting.

"I'll have company back to the *dorp*," he said.

Expertly he rolled a cigarette and put it between his lips.

A horseman rode madly into sight. A few minutes later he pulled up opposite Drury, filling the air with a choking cloud of dust.

"Trooper!" the man gasped excitedly. "There's been a bad accident at Henson's place. Old man Henson—I've told him a hundred times to get rid of that blasted stallion—was kicked on the head. I'm riding for the doctor. Go on back will you an' sit with him. He's all alone and——"

The man dug his spurs into his horse and rode off.

"Hi!" Drury shouted, slightly bewildered by the swift turn of fate which had capped his day of peace with tragedy. "Hi!" he shouted again meaning to call the man back.

But the rider appeared not to hear; at least he made no response to Drury's shouts and, in a few moments he had passed out of sight and hearing.

"The dumb fool," Drury grumbled. "What's he want to wish a job like this on me for. I could have sent a doctor out. Hell! I ain't no nurse."

But almost immediately his resentment vanished.

"Poor old Henson!" he exclaimed and, wheeling his horse, galloped to give what assistance he could.

Ten minutes later he reached the Henson homestead. Dismounting quickly he went into a hut where a light was burning.

On a bed was a man's body—strangely stiff and still.

"He's dead," said Drury and shuddered slightly at the horrible, bloody wounds which mutilated the old man's face and head. A clumsy attempt had been made to bandage the injuries.

"Must 'a' been kicked to death," Drury continued. "Wonder he lived at all after that lot. No wonder Timms was excited an' didn't know where he was at."

Timms, old Henson's partner, was the man who had ridden in for a doctor.

"An' all a doctor can do," Drury mused, "is sign a death certificate—hold on—what the hell——"

He stood for a little while in silence, looking down at the dead man, then he tip-toed out of the hut.

Half an hour later, having rubbed down, stabled and fed his horse, he attended to his own comforts.

Finding that he had no appetite for food, he went into the large living hut, lighted a lamp, and rolled and lighted a cigarette. But that, for once, failed to solace him and he only persisted in smoking in the hope that it would afford him a respite from the cloud of angry, *pinging* mosquitoes which swarmed around him.

He closed his eyes, hoping that sleep would come—but his brain was too active.

"I'm acting like a blamed fool—but it's too darned queer about that——" he grumbled. Then he opened his eyes and sat up, determined to give his mind free play with the things which were disturbing him.

"Old Henson now," he said, giving voice to his thoughts, "he was a peculiar feller. Hard to to get along with, accordin' to talk. An' yet—I dunno! He seemed a reg'lar guy when I met him this morning. Come to think of it, his partner, Timms, is the laddie who spread the rumor that Henson was a bit queer. But that way of thinkin' leads us nowhere. Unless——" He shook his head. "I sure got a touch of fever, else I wouldn't let my imagination run away with me that way. Old Henson was ap-

parently kicked to death—no doubt about that. An' it ain't likely anybody—Timms, for instance—could train a horse to commit murder. Besides—there'd be no object to it."

He was silent for a while, his shaggy brows knit in an effort of concentration. Thoughts came and went. One or two persisted, although he told himself that he was a fool and probably suffering from fever delirium.

At last he roused himself and went over to the other hut and, gently removing the blood-stained bandages, closely examined the ghastly wounds. Whistling softly, he replaced the bandages and returned to the living hut. His attitude now had changed in some vague way. He became more impersonal; his brain took complete charge of his body. He became a cold, logical thinker and he concentrated on the problem he had set himself.

"But there ain't no answer, there ain't no problem," he finally concluded. "I'm barking up the wrong tree. I'm seeing things what ain't."

He looked round the hut. On the table was a portrait of a sweet-faced girl in nurse's costume.

"Hell!" Drury exclaimed, recognizing the portrait to be that of one of the nurses in the hospital he had so recently left. "So she's poor old Henson's daughter. An' I never guessed. Come to think of it, why should I have? This'll be hard on her. She thought the world an' all of her 'Daddy.' Aw hell! Always talking about him, she was. An' she's a good kid."

Drury thought of the many kindnesses the girl had shown him, cheering him out of the fits of awful despondency which had retarded his recovery.

On the table in front of the portrait was a little pile of quartz. Drury picked up one of the stones, scratched it with his thumb nail, turned it over and over meditatively.

He examined the others in the same way.

"Looks rich," he concluded. "Wonder where it came from. Wonder——"

He decided to question some of the native laborers—then realized that there were none on the place. At least none had appeared on his arrival tonight although there had been plenty in evidence when he had called that morning.

"Maybe," he concluded, "they've all gone to a beer drink."

And then his eyes closed; presently he slept.

DRURY was awakened by the arrival of Timms and the doctor. He blinked sheepishly at them as they stood before him.

"Yuh been a long time, Timms," he complained, yawning and stretching himself. "An' yuh might have saved yourself the trip. The poor devil was dead when I got here. As near as not I rode off, seeing as there was nothing here for me to do. I ought to have been in before sundown. Yuh see: I've only just come out of hospital an'——"

"It hasn't seemed to affect your voice, Trooper," the doctor said curtly. He turned to Timms, shrugging his shoulders. "Well: There's nothing I can do—I could have done nothing even if I'd been here at the time. Wonder is that he lived at all. He spoke to you, you said?"

Timms nodded.

"Yes," he answered. "He—" the man hesitated "—asked me to look after his daughter. Asked me, as a matter of fact, to marry her. But——" he shook his head sadly "—I'm afraid she won't have me. Oh, well! I shall give her a fair price for her father's share of the farm and stock. It ain't worth much though. We've been sailing pretty close to the wind for a long time."

"So I've always understood," the doctor remarked dryly. "At least I've had difficulty in collecting an old account."

Timms shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll be paid some time, doctor," he said. "And now how about you staying the night? I can put you up comfortably and—"

he hesitated "—I hate like hell the idea of staying alone tonight."

The doctor snorted contemptuously.

"Yes; of course I'm going to stay. Think I'm going to ride back to the *dorp* now—late as it is?" He looked keenly at Drury. "And you'll stay too, Trooper," he continued with a touch of his professional manner. "You look to me as if you're running a temperature. Just out of hospital, you say? *Hmph!* What did they put you on duty for? Shorthanded?"

"I'm on light duty—that's all, Doc," Drury drawled. "Reckoned to be back before sundown. Never thought I'd be running into anything like this."

The doctor, impatiently silencing his protests, felt Drury's pulse and took his temperature.

"Just as I thought," he remarked complacently. "Running a temperature. *Hmph!* So you stay here the night. That's final."

"'S O.K. with me, Doc," Drury said. and somehow felt immensely relieved. His head ached; his eyes watered.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "I'm almighty dry."

He made no protest when they half-led, half-carried him to one of the sleeping huts, undressed him and put him to bed.

He gulped down the medicine the doctor gave him; smiled at that man's assurance that he would be better in the morning, muttered, "Gosh, but I sure am ready to play shut eye," and the next moment was snoring heartily.

IT WAS sunrise when Drury awakened. The man Timms stood beside his bed, looking at him with every appearance of solicitude.

"How do you feel, old timer?" he asked. "Sleep well?"

"Too damn well, Drury replied. "Reckon I'm not awake yet."

He stared appraisingly at Timms, his eyes half closed.

"The Doc gone yet?" he asked.

"Not yet. He's having skoff. How do you feel? Well enough to ride back to the *dorp* with him? Or do you want to stay in bed a bit?"

"I'm getting up," said Drury. "Be with you in five-ten minutes. I ought to have gone back to the *dorp* last night. I'll get hell for staying out like this."

"Don't you worry," Timms replied soothingly. "They won't say anything—not when they know the facts.

"Well—I'll send a nigger in with some water. I'm going now to see the cookboy about some more grub. How'll bacon an' eggs suit you?"

"Fine!" said Drury. "Got an appetite like a horse."

As Timms left the hut Drury got out of bed and commenced to dress. But the hut reeled round at a dizzy pace and he was forced to lie down again.

"Hell!" he exclaimed softly. "This won't do. I got to pull myself together."

A native came in with a bucket of cold water. Drury ducked his head in it, towelled himself vigorously and felt better.

He finished dressing and went outside the tent. He smiled as he saw that his horse and the doctor's were saddled ready for their departure.

He went into the *skoff* hut.

The doctor and Timms had finished their breakfasts but still sat at the table.

The doctor nodded a curt good morning, adding:

"You look washed out, Trooper. But that's natural. No temperature this morning? No. A little weak—naturally. Well—you'd better not eat much now—a cup of coffee and a little toast. Then we'll ride back to the *dorp* together." He looked impatiently at his watch.

"Don't want a blamed thing to eat or drink. Not a blamed thing," said Drury.

"Then we can start back now," said the doctor, rising briskly. "I'll send out the death certificate to you, Timms."

"An' what," Drury drawled, "are you goin' to certify was the cause of death, doctor?"

"Injuries to head——" the doctor rattled out a long technical explanation of the na-

ture of the injuries which had caused Henson's death.

Drury nodded.

"Accidental death, eh, Doctor."

"Of course, of course." He advanced toward the door but Drury, leaning against the upright, barred the way.

"Not so fast, doctor. This may not be according to Hoyle but I got to get all the facts of the case so's I can send in a proper report."

"All you have to say, Trooper," Timms put in suavely, "is that Mr. Hensen was kicked to death by a horse. That's what happened."

"Furthermore," snapped the doctor, "I would have you know, Trooper, that I have a practice to consider. At ten-thirty I'm due at the hospital to perform an operation. A most interesting case. The patient ——" He broke off suddenly.

"Let me pass," he demanded.

"Yes—get out of the way, Trooper," Timms said in support. "Don't act like an officious fool. I've got enough worry—what with losing my old partner in such a tragic way—without having you add to them by damn fool, unnecessary investigations. You know Mr. Henson's dead; you heard the doctor explain the cause of death. Well—that's enough for anybody."

"It ain't enough for me," said Drury quietly. "Us three are goin' to have a little talk together. See?"

THE doctor fumed. "By what right do you detain me?" he exclaimed.

Timms sprang forward with an oath—then halted and stared with astonishment at the revolver Drury leveled at him. The doctor stared too.

"A most interesting example," the doctor observed, "of perfect muscular coördination. I barely distinguished your movements, Trooper. You drew your weapon with the speed and smoothness of a prestidigitator."

"Aw, doctor," Drury said bashfully, "that's nothing. It's only a trick. But it took years of practice.

"However—that's neither here nor there. Yuh got to admit that this here is good authority for me holding a little investigation—an unofficial inquest, sort of. See? An' the quicker you see reason, the quicker us can get the business over."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and sat down.

"This is monstrous," Timms blustered. "I refuse to be browbeaten by this clodhopper of a trooper."

"You ain't goin' to be browbeaten, mister," Drury expostulated mildly. "An there's no need to call names. I'm a-doin' my duty—that's all. I got to have the facts for my report. You see, mister," the continued, "You been an' accused a horse of being a murderer. Well—all I wants is the facts. An' if, so be, the evidence bears out what I suspects—why I'm agoin' to arrest the murderer."

"You damned fool!" Timms snapped. "You can't arrest a horse."

"I might—yuh never know. Now suppose you sit down, mister."

Timms looked at the doctor who shrugged his shoulders. That man was watching Drury with something approaching interest.

"He's delirious, doctor!" Timms said. "Are you going to humor the fool?"

"Quite!" the doctor said placidly. He looked at his watch. "I find that I can spare forty minutes to your unofficial inquest, Trooper. Is that long enough?"

"Quite!" Drury chuckled grimly. "Maybe fifteen'll be plenty."

The doctor nodded.

"Good. Sit down, Timms. Sit down, man. And, Trooper, you had better sit down too. At least, put away your revolver. I think I detected a slight waver—as if your hand trembled. Good God! Where *have* you put it!"

Timms seated himself; Drury also acted on the doctor's suggestion. He rolled himself a cigarette, lighted it and blew a cloud of smoke into Timms's eyes.

"Blast you," Timms bellowed angrily,

leaping to his feet, thumping the table with his powerful fist.

"Sit down," said Drury.

Timms sat down; his face was white with rage; his black eyes blazed malevolently.

"Now then," Drury said slowly, getting out his notebook, moistening the point of his pencil between his lips, "let's have the facts.

"You say, mister," he directly addressed Timms, "that Henson was kicked to death by a horse—a stallion, yuh said."

Timms licked his lips.

"Yes; a black, nigger-bred beast—a man-killer from the day he was foaled, if you ask me."

"An' I am asking yuh," Drury commented softly.

Timms stared uncomprehendingly and continued, almost glibly, "I begged Henson to get rid of the brute—sell or shoot him. But he wouldn't—he was obstinate at times, old Henson was. Well—he's paid for it, God knows."

"So the horse killed him, eh?"

"That's what I said," Timms said irritably.

"How do yuh know?"

"How do I know?" Timms shouted. "Why, I saw it, you damned fool."

"HOW was I to know you'd seen it?" Drury expostulated mildly. "If you'd said that before you'd have saved time. Anybody else seen it?"

"No!"

"No natives?"

"No. They'd all gone to a beer-drink. As a matter of fact," he confessed with a sudden show of frankness, "me and Henson had a few words about them going. He didn't want 'em to go—hard on his niggers, Henson was. Treated 'em like dogs. Anyway, when he heard I'd let 'em all go off to this beer-drink he was wild. Called me a damned nigger lover an' other things not so nice. He was still in a temper when he went to catch Darkie—that's the stallion.

He added mournfully, "In a way, I feel responsible for Henson's death. If I hadn't made him mad he might have been more careful in handling the horse."

"I don't think you need blame yourself for that, Timms," the doctor observed.

"'Course not," echoed Drury. "No blame attached to you, mister, that way.

"Well—seeing as you was the only witness to the accident suppose you tell us how it happened?"

Timms passed his hand across his eyes.

"It all happened so quickly," he said, "that my mind's a bit dazed. I don't quite know how it started. I mean I haven't got all the happenings in proper sequence maybe.

"Henson and me both went down to the paddock where Darkie was turned out to graze. We were still arguing about the niggers. Henson said——"

"What did you go to the paddock for?" Drury interrupted.

"To strengthen the fence. That blasted horse had almost broken through in one place."

"He's shod—the horse, I mean."

Timms nodded.

"Shod him myself, always. An' a hell of a job it was too, let me tell you. Had to throw him before I could touch his hind legs. And once——"

"Never mind that," Drury interrupted again. "Go on with the evidence. You an' Henson went down to the paddock to mend some broken rails, you say. Go on."

Timms snorted. "You getting a thrill out of this, Trooper?" he asked contemptuously.

"Shouldn't wonder. Are yuh?"

"Get on with your story, Timms," the doctor said, acting the part of a peacemaker.

Timms nodded.

"Well—when we got to the paddock fence I was so sick of hearing Henson lecture me on the proper way to treat niggers that I tried to change the subject.

"'You ought to kill that horse, Henson,' I said, 'before the brute kills one of us!'

"You see the stallion came tearing up to where we'd started work on the fence.

Mad he was. Ears back, eyes red, tail cocked. He rushed at the fence, squealing. I drew my revolver—I was scared, I tell you. Wish to God I'd shot it then and there.

"But old Henson only laughed. He called me a white-livered coward. He said the horse was as gentle as a lamb. My God! He said it only wanted to be treated gently. And the old fool climbed over the fence."

Timms shuddered.

"Yep! Go on!" Drury said matter of factly.

"You're a blasted ghoul, that what you are," Timms exclaimed indignantly. "You want all the nasty details, don't you?"

"Well," Drury drawled defensively. "I gotta make a full an' complete report, mister, that's the only reason I'm so blamed curious. Yuh see—I ain't so very popular with the sergeant-major as it is an' if I go back with a half-baked story—after staying out all night—he'll be madder'n hell! Put me on the peg most like! So, mister, go on. Let's have all the horrid details."

TIMMS shrugged his shoulders. He looked at the doctor, but getting no encouragement from that man, continued.

"Well, Henson climbed over the fence and walks up to Darkie, holding out his hand and saying 'Cup cup!' Chucking like an old hen, he was. Twice that damned horse walked past him as quiet, seemingly, as an old cow. Then, as he came by the third time—old Henson had stooped a bit to get a handful of grass—he turned with a squeal and lashed out with his hind legs. Like lightning it was. *Smash! Smash!* God! It made me feel sick. I couldn't move or speak. Henson—he went over backward. I fired at that blasted horse—but missed. Imagine I was all of a shake. But the brute galloped away, neighing and prancing as if he'd done something to be proud of. Then I ran to Henson, picked him up and carried him to his hut. I saw things were pretty hopeless, but I bandaged him up as good as I could. He was conscious for a bit.

"'Take care of daughter,' he said. 'Marry her, Timms.' And a minute later he said, 'You've been a good partner, Timms. I'm sorry I lost my temper about the niggers.'"

Timms hid his eyes for a moment with his hand.

"That's all," he concluded brokenly. "I saw there was nothing I could do, so I rode off for a doctor, saw you, Trooper, and —" he shrugged his shoulders "—the rest you know."

Drury nodded.

"Yep!" he said laconically. "The rest I know."

He turned to the doctor.

"You saw the body?"

"Of course."

"An' examined the wounds?"

"Yes."

"And in your opinion they could have been caused in the way described by Mister Timms."

"Undoubtedly. Undoubtedly. It is possible, Trooper, to trace the outline of the shoe."

"Ah!" Drury turned to Timms again. "You did say the horse kicked with his hind legs, didn't you, mister?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Only wanted to get facts straight in my report, mister, that's all. The horse didn't paw at him, did it? Didn't rear up an' strike Henson with his front feet or anything like that?"

"No!" Timms said curtly.

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. It happened as I said—and I'm not likely to forget it."

Drury rose to his feet. He swayed a little.

"Gosh!" He exclaimed. "I feel like bed instead of all this investigating. But it's got to be done. Come on! We'll all just go an' have one look at the body. There's one or two points I want you to explain—then we can go back to the *dorp*."

The three went outside—Timms reluctantly—and walked over to the hut where the dead man was.

The doctor called attention to the horseshoe which was nailed over the door for luck.

"That," he said, "might be taken as indicative of bad luck if one were superstitious. The luck is spilling out!"

Drury barely suppressed a gasp then started forward.

"I'll put it the right way up," he said.

Timms's heavy hand grasped him by the shoulder, halting him.

"You leave that the way it is," he said, hoarsely. "It's always been that way—it's always going to be that way as a——" he hesitated and then went on to a stammering conclusion "—in memory of the best pal a man ever had."

The doctor looked at him shrewdly.

"The sentiments do you justice," said Drury and passed into the hut.

PRESENTLY the others followed. They found Drury standing beside the bed, looking down at the dead man.

The doctor went to his side; Timms, loudly objecting to what he called "An unnecessary and callous exhibition of petty authority," stood at the foot of the bed.

"There ain't much more I want to know," Drury said softly. "An' I ain't enjoyin' this, let me tell yuh, mister. But I got to get my facts straight. You can see that, can't you? I gotta write a full report an'——"

"Hell!" Timms snapped. "Get on with it man. Get on with it."

"I'll do that. Say, Doctor," the red-headed trooper continued. "Yuh've heard Mister Timms, here, explain how the thing happened. Well now—are them wounds the sort of wounds you'd expect to see after such an accident."

"Quite," said the doctor positively. "No doubt about that at all. Surely," he was mildly sarcastic, "you are not suggesting that Henson was killed in some other way?"

"He's fool enough," Timms growled "to say poor old Henson committed suicide."

"I ain't, mister. Nothing further from my thoughts," Drury said slowly. I'm only aiming to get at the facts. An' if I'm a bit slow, you'll have to blame it on the fever. I ain't supposed to be doing anything like this. I'm on light duty, I am. But there yuh are. I happened to stumble onto this case——"

"It's not a case." Timms said testily.

"Call it what you like, mister, but you can take it from me there'll be nothing missing from my report that ought to be there.

"So, doctor, I asks you to examine them wounds again."

The doctor did so. He examined them thoroughly. He took measurements.

Timms moved restlessly.

"I'm going outside," he announced.

"You'll stay here," Drury countered flatly.

The doctor straightened himself and turned to face Drury.

"I've examined the wounds again, Trooper. Well?"

"And yuh've got nothin' to add to your first statement, doctor?"

"Not a thing."

"Aw, hell!" Drury seemed disconsolate.

"What did you expect me to find?" the doctor said curiously.

"Oh let it rest, doc," Timms exclaimed impatiently. "You've humored him enough and I'm sick of it. He's delirious. Take him back to the *dorp* and send him to bed."

Drury smiled wanly.

"When did old Henson locate that rich reef?" he asked abruptly.

"Yesterday after—what rich reef? What you talking about?"

"Just talking. I noticed some rich-looking quartz in the hut over yonder."

Timms laughed.

"Oh! Them specimens! A sundowner gave old Henson them hunks some time back. They came from somewhere up country, Wankie way I believe. They——"

He stopped abruptly. Obviously Drury was not interested. Indeed he had turned his back on Timms and was facing the doctor once again.

"Doc," he said, "don't it strike you as

funny that the deepest part of the wounds is at the top."

"No!" the doctor was genuinely bewildered. "I don't quite understand you, Trooper."

"THEN let's put it this way, doc," Drury said patiently. "Henson was kicked by a horse, he was bendin' a bit at the time, yuh'll recollect. An' the horse was lashing out with hind legs. Well!——"

"He might have reared an' struck out with his forefeet too," Timms said hastily. "I told you I was sort of dazed about it all, didn't I?"

"Yep! But I reckon you was right about this. The mark of the shoe's there—an' it's a hind shoe, mister." Drury's tone was almost casual. "Well, doctor, what about it? Remembering it was a kick from the hind quarters—where'd yuh expect to find the deepest part of the wound? Where'd yuh expect to find the mark of the toe of the shoe? An' which way up would the mark of the shoe be—with the heels up, or the heels down."

"Why," the doctor replied slowly. "Of course—the deepest wound would be at the lowest part of the the face, I imagine. The toe of the shoe would certainly be marked there. An' the mark of the shoe would be right way up—this way." And he traced the outline of a horseshoe on his face. "The toe here—" he pointed to his mouth, "the heels here and here—" he pointed to his temples. "That is, of course, if the kicks landed square, as they did in this case, according to Timms. And as he was the only eyewitness of the tragedy we must take his word for it."

Timms moved impatiently toward the door.

"Come on," he said. "I've had enough of this. I've got stock to tend and——"

"Just a minute, I only want to ask the doctor one more question an' then, I reckon, my case is complete."

"Listen, doc, you've told me how the wounds ought to look. Well—I now asks: Do they?"

The doctor looked again at the dead man, then at Drury. There was a look of puzzled amazement in his eyes.

"By God, no!" he cried. "They don't. They're just the opposite of what they ought to be. The toe's at the top; the heels are at the bottom. The wounds couldn't have been made—Hi! Where are you going!"

Drury did no answer. He had suddenly realized that Timms was no longer in the hut and, cursing his own carelessness, he himself rushed outside just in time to see Timms vault into the saddle of the doctor's horse and ride madly away.

Drury mounted too and gave chase—and as he rode he spun the rope which hung from his saddle wallet.

The doctor, standing at the door of the hut shouted wrathful inquiries. Native laborers, talking excitedly watched the chase with wide open eyes.

With every stride Drury gained ground.

"Stop!" he shouted.

Timms turned in the saddle, his face twisting with rage. A revolver glistened in his hand. He opened fire, but his aim was poor.

Drury bending low, spurred his horse to a still faster gait; Timms gave up his shooting when his revolver was empty, and concentrated on riding, spurring his mount continuously.

But his efforts were unavailing. Gradually Drury was closing the gap between them.

They were riding alongside a wire fence now, and a big black stallion galloped up—on the other side of the fence—and raced neck and neck with Timms's mount.

Timms swerved suddenly to the right away from the fence. The stallion swerved too, leaped the fence, and gave chase, squealing furiously.

White-faced, Timms looked back over his shoulder. The stallion was almost abreast of him.

"Shoot the devil!" he screamed. "He's mad!" Timms tried to swerve again and

his mount went down in a heap, pitching him head-first onto a rocky outcrop.

The stallion propped. Then it reared, hitting out at the air with its front feet like a boxer. Then on sighting Timms who sprawled on the ground, it reared again.

It was then that Drury made his cast. The noose of his rope round the stallion's neck, tightened and pulled the brute over backward.

THAT was the last Drury remembered for a while. The fever weakness suddenly overtook him, as he afterward expressed it, "I passed out an' fell from my horse like a blamed tenderfoot!"

When consciousness returned to him he was lying on a bed in one of the huts. As he struggled to a sitting position the doctor entered.

"Ah!" exclaimed that man. "Sitting up and ready for nourishment, eh? Well now, perhaps you'll permit me to return to the *dorp*."

"Sure," Drury exclaimed. "But where's Timms?"

"In his hut—he's all right except for a slight concussion and a broken thigh; it's my opinion, Trooper, you saved his life, I told him that but he didn't seem to appreciate it."

"He wouldn't," Drury said dryly. "I reckon he's goin' to lose it again in a mighty unpleasant way."

"You mean?" the doctor questioned wonderingly.

"He's my prisoner," Drury replied. "Gosh! I must go an' arrest him properly, an' warn him, an' all that."

"What are you arresting him for, Trooper?"

"Murder, Doc. He killed old Henson, you know."

"I was beginning to suspect as much," the doctor muttered as he followed Drury out of the hut. "But I can't for the life of me see where your proof comes in."

HELL, Drury," growled the sergeant-major. "Why don't you use a bit of sense. You was on light duty, an' yet you go an' get messed up in an affair like this."

"I've been resting, sergeant-major, sir. Yesterday was a nice peaceful day!"

"Must have been," scoffed the sergeant-major. "Must have been. But I'm damned if I can see what set you off thinking an accident wasn't an accident."

"You'll find it all in the report, sergeant-major, sir. I wrote a very full one. An', besides, you got Timms's confession, haven't you? Well then."

"I've read 'em—but I want to know more."

"I thought things was funny before ever I saw poor old Henson's body," Drury said. "An' when I saw the wounds—I knew blamed well there was something queer about it—but I was slow working things out. I reckon my head ached so much I couldn't see things properly."

"Well—there you are. As soon as I suspected things were wrong I couldn't let go 'till I'd proved 'em. An' it was easy, in a way, except there didn't seem no motive. I could only guess at that. I said: Supposing old Henson had dissolved partnership with Timms—but no one knew it yet—an' supposing old Henson had located gold on the farm. That 'ud be motive enough."

The sergeant-major nodded.

"We know now that was the motive. As a matter of fact the partnership had been dissolved over a year ago. Timms was only a paid employe. Henson kept him on out of pity and, as a sop to Timms's pride, let on they were still partners."

"Go on!"

Drury nodded:

"Well—I'd thought up a motive. With Henson out of the way, Timms planned to grab everything there was, buy from Henson's daughter her share in her father's estate, wait a few months then discover the gold for himself.

"But hell! Motive wasn't enough. I

reckon most folks have got motives enough to kill somebody or other. But motives ain't proof. An' I couldn't see how the murder —if it was a murder—was done.

"An' I might still have been in the dark yet, if the doctor hadn't called my attention to that lucky horseshoe. Lucky! My Gawd! It was anything but. Yuh see I remembered that horseshoe. I seen it when I called at the homestead in the morning. An' it was right way up then! It was holding the luck all right. An' when Timms stopped me from taking it down an' hanging it up right way—why, I didn't really need that to prove my case."

The sergeant-major nodded sagely.

"It was a devilishly clever murder, Drury," he said. "And it would never have been discovered if anybody but you had been on that commonage patrol yesterday."

"Aw—now you're kidding me, sergeant-major, sir. It was a piece of bull luck for me. But you're right. Timms planned damn clever. But he made his first mistake when he nailed that shoe onto an ax handle an' used it as a club to beat in the old man's brains. He nailed it on the wrong way. See! He nailed it this way—he ought to have done it this way." Drury drew two diagrams to illustrate his meaning. Thus:

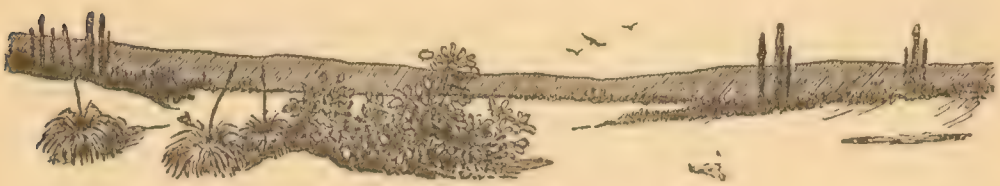
"If he'd done it this way," Drury continued, referring to his second crude drawing, "he'd have got away with his plan. That weapon 'ud have made the sort of wounds consistent with his story.

"An' his second mistake, of course, was when he nailed back the shoe over the door the wrong way up.

"An' so I nailed him. That's all, sergeant-major, sir. Except—I'm applying for a month's leave. Do you think I'll get it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised, Drury. Not a bit. You need a rest!"

"Rest, hell," scoffed Drury. "No more light duty for me. It's too blamed exciting."



PAYNE OUTRAN A HORSE

Andrew Payne, the twenty-year-old Oklahoma boy that won the transcontinental marathon from California to New York, developed his endurance by racing a saddle horse. While attending school in Claremore, eight miles from home, he daily outran the mount which his younger brother rode.

Each morning Payne let his brother get a good start and then took after him. The route lay over eight miles of rock, mud and hills but Andrew usually arrived at school ahead of his brother and the horse.

The track team of Claremore high school was chiefly composed of Payne. On one occasion he was entered in the district track meet at Miami but the automobile broke down. The result was that Payne arrived just in time to enter the mile race without changing clothes. Burdened with his farm boots and everyday attire, he ran away from his rivals.

Andy went into the transcontinental foot race as the representative of Claremore and its most distinguished citizen, Will Rogers. His father and the lasso comedian used to bunk together when they worked on a ranch.

—*Guy Rader.*

RIGHT SMACK AT YOU!

By W. WIRT

Author of "That Fish Thing," "When Tigers Are Hunting," etc.

Somewhere up in Turkestan, in the desert of Kyzyl-kum, beyond Famine Steppe, lay the tomb of Jagatai Khan, son of the Earth Shaker. Rotten rich with loot it was, so the tale ran, and rumors that deadly peril shrouded this old lost tomb but added to its lure—a lure that drew Jimmie Cordie, Red Dolan, and their friends up into the distant, forbidding hills

CHAPTER I

THE SON OF JENGHIZ KHAN

"THE Yid believes it," said the Boston Bean, "And he wouldn't lie to me!"

"Why not?" asked Red Dolan lazily, from the couch in Grigsby's apartment in Hong Kong, China, where his two hundred and thirty pounds of bone and muscle lay sprawled out. "And why wouldn't he lie to the like of ye, Beany, darlin'?"

"Well, I saved his bacon once and——"

"Never mind those apes," interrupted Putney looking up from his game of solitaire. "Tell it to me; I wasn't listening when you started."

"I met the Fighting Yid and another man this morning," began the Bean, whose aristocratic sorrowful looking face concealed a reckless happy-go-lucky heart and chilled steel nerve. "They just got in from Chinese Turkestan. They met a bird up there that had been run out of Samarkand, they said—he had gone in up in the northwest by the Famine Steppe and the desert of Kyzyl-kum and——"

"Enough!" said Red sitting up, "tell us no more. Them names is plenty. 'Famine desert,' says me bold Beany and——"

"Pipe down, Red," commanded Jimmie Cordie. "Go on, Bean. I've been in that neck of the woods."

"All right, I will. In the year 1219, to begin at the beginning, Jenghiz Khan came down from Mongolia with his youngest son, Tulé, and mopped up on Bokhara."

"Correct," affirmed Jimmie Cordie. "And when he got in the said Bokhara, he stood on the steps of the principal mosque and shouted to his horde, 'The hay is cut; give your horses fodder!' Then they looted the city."

"Well," went on the Bean, "after the looting of the town, Jenghiz Khan started back to Mongolia by way of Samarkand. One of his generals came from the Kara-kul Oasis——"

"Wrong," said Jimmie firmly. "All wrong—and you from Boston. What happened was this. He had several sons who used to lead the hordes, one of whom was named Jagatai. That baby had been jazzing around with some of his pa's men, and going through the pass of Taras, had taken Otrar for the old man. At Kara-kul he called it a day and kicked the bucket. His pa decided to bury him there with all the honors of war because he, the said Jagatai, loved that neck of the woods. So they took him out in the rocky hills that the desert of Kyzyl-kum is crossed by, and after scragging all his personal servants and concubines and what not, they buried him. Proceed from there, Beaneater!"

"You seem to know so damn much about it," said the Bean. "What else did they bury with him. You ought to know—I suppose you were there?"

"No," grinned Cordie. "The day he was buried I was in a stud poker game with the Khan of the Tartars. I know what they put in the hole with him though. All the loot that was his share was put in!"

"Exactly," answered the Bean. "And from that day to this, it's been right there—waiting for whoever finds it. This lad that the Yid met said that——"

"Too many 'he said' and 'the Yid said,'" interrupted Grigsby. "Go and get the Yid and this Scotchman, if he's still around. We'll get at it first hand."

"I'll be back in an hour," said the Bean. "I left them down at the place of One Million Delights."

"And that's wan hell of a fine place to leave anyone!" yelled Red as the Bean closed the door behind him.

"WHAT do you think about it?" asked Putney after the footfalls of the Boston Bean had died away.

Jimmie Cordie laughed. "It's just one of those things. No doubt there's a raft of those tombs scattered all over the lot up there, but nine-tenths of them have been looted five hundred years ago. And also, young fellers me lad, the amount of stuff they had in 'em was exaggerated."

"I suppose, now, ye have looted some, ye grave robber," jeered Red.

"Not more than six or eight," answered Jimmie with a grin.

They all laughed, the four men who had fought together in the Foreign Legion, the A. E. F. and afterward, wherever there was need of machine guns and rifles. They had fought for War Lords—and for themselves.

"You say you've been up there, Jimmie?" asked Grigsby.

"Yeah—years ago though. I was with my pa when he was special agenting. To tell the truth I don't remember much about it, being a youngster at the time, but I do remember this—that's no country to go jazzing around in hunting any man's tomb. We were at the oasis of Kara-kul. That's where I got the dope about Jagatai, Jenghiz Khan's son. It's not like China up in that man's country. You can't slap a few out of the way and see the rest run. Up there they'll run—but right smack at you, old kid."

"Wait a minute," said Grigsby. "I thought that there was only a few Kirghiz tribesmen up in that country."

"You better take a few more thinks," said Jimmie. "In Samarkand there are over

one million people. My gosh, it's 26,000 square miles. Man, they've got mountains up there 22,000 feet high. Not in the Famine Steppe or the desert of Kyzyl-kum, which is in the northwest, but in other parts. Darn right there are a few Kirghiz up there—and also, my fair dumb-bells, if you or any other white man go jazzing around there you'll find that more than a few Afghans, Tartars, Uzbegs and Tajiks will come rallying around the old flag."

"And what the hell do ye care, Jimmie Cordie?" demanded Red. "Is it ye now that is sittin' there and trying to tell us, what wid a couple of machine guns and the rest, that we couldn't slap all them guys you do be namin' outta the way?"

"Listen, you red-headed bum from Cork, these birds have guns, *sabe?* And they think when they die on the field of battle they go to Paradise."

"All right," interrupted Grigsby. "What I want to know is—if it looks like the real thing, what's the best way to go in?"

"We can get in easy enough," answered Jimmie. "But getting out is something else again. But far be it from me to frighten you delicate young ladies off. I just wanted to tell you what's doing up there. We can go up the Persian Gulf to Bushire, then to Teheran and then to Astrabad. I know a lad up there—if he hasn't been bumped off before now. He'll pass us on to Bokhara. That is unless you gents had rather take a little walk through Afghanistan."

"Never mind the kidding stuff," said Grigsby. "Go on from there."

"Go on from there? From Bokhara we go over into Samarkand, that's all. We walk up to the tomb, open it, take the stuff, turn around, walk back to Bokhara and come home. Simple isn't it?"

GRIGSBY'S Chinese boy ushered into the big living room the Boston Bean, the Fighting Yid and a tall, gaunt Scotchman.

"Come over and sit by me, ye Yid beneath notice," said Red, after the introductions were over and the house boy had put bottles and glasses on the table. "Then ye will be right handy for me to play the 'Wearin of the Green' on the coco of ye, do I think ye are about to tell the truth!"

"Big Irish loafer!" promptly returned the Yid, sitting down alongside the big Irishman who would make three of him. "Me and Jimmie vill kick the slats from you, gondiff? Ain't it, Jimmie?".

"Darn right it ain't," answered Jimmie. "You can do it easy enough by yourself—why drag me in for a kid's job."

"Let's dispense with any more foolish remarks," said Grigsby, "and get down to cases on this thing. Mr. MacIntosh, will you tell us just what you know of this chap van Johann and what he told you?"

"This I know about Johann," answered MacIntosh grimly. "When he was to the lee-side of a bowl o' whusky, there was nae raising him. He wadna' lie for the mere sake of the lie, ye ken. What he was doin' way up yonder is no my affair. What he says he saw, I believe he saw—but I'll go no further!"

"He told it to me, George," said the Yid. "He vas up dare mit some fellers who vos lookin' for some ruins mit writtin' on dem, for some society vat is in Germany. Vell, he vanders avay some day and up on de side of a hill what has caved in, is dere a place vot looks like a hole in the ground, ain't it? He goes in, all by himself, und he sees a big room in de back und dare is skeletons und gold und diamonds und everyting. He takes it a handful und goes out to go back und get his gang und just ven he is tellin' dem about it—bingo—dey is jumped by all de people. Dare is a runnin' fight und finally he und von odder chap vins clear out of all of dem, und comes down through Tagharma into Turkestan, where ve met him. He vanted us to back mit him und get a outfit togedder. Ven ve vouldn't—he goes down into Kashmir. I got it from him just vare de place is."

"Where it was, you mean," said Jimmie Cordie, with a grin. "You poor fish, what do you think the bunch that jumped him are

doing—letting it stay there?"

"Vate a minute, Mister Viseguy," grinned the Yid. "De hole vas only a small von, und before he vent back he covered it up mit dirt und everything. Ven he vos jumped dey come from de odder side."

"Yeah? My mistake, Mister Cohen. Did he tell you how to get to it?"

"He did—und also he got it a promise from me that did I go und find dem, he vould get it his share."

"Fair enough," said Grigsby. "He will. Want to go along, Mr. MacIntosh?"

"I do not!" said that gentleman, rising. "I ha' heard full many the time of the four of ye, and would I be wishful of goin' anywhere it is with ye I'd be glad to go. As it is—no, all the time, not up there, for no man or money!"

"Well, if we go—and we find anything, we'll save some for you," answered Grigsby. "How's that?"

MacIntosh grinned. "If ye come back—with anything—ye can leave my bit with the British Consulate. I'll bid ye all good day!" He took up his hat and, without another word, stalked out.

"Vell," said the Yid, after the door closed, "do ve go up and take a look-see?"

Chapter II

"Right smack at you!"

THE tight, compact column advanced slowly into the Kyzyl-kum. They had come up the way Jimmie Cordie had outlined, as English scientists, going in to investigate an archaeological find reported to the Royal Geographical Society of London. Jimmie Cordie, who, as Red said "could projuce anything at any time," had, in an afternoon in Hong Kong, gotten credentials signed and gold-sealed by everyone but the President of China. Yen Yuan, head of the Taiping, the most dreaded and powerful secret society in China, whose son Jimmie had saved from death in the States, when they were students at Boston Tech, had furnished them with two hundred fighting men, ostensibly to act as bearers, but in reality to serve as fighting men when necessary. If the outfit seemed unusually heavily loaded, it was explained that the bulk of it comprised scientific instruments and digging tools. There was very little trouble made, though. The credentials, the presence of the Taiping—whose members were scattered through the Orient, wherever there were Chinese—was generally sufficient to pass them along. Incidentally, the hard-boiled look of the entire outfit discouraged any unwarranted investigation. It would have taken more of an army than any lord of a city had, to have stopped them, and as a result they were passed along, paying for what they got promptly, until they reached the Kyzyl-kum Desert. Once in, it was a different matter. It was no man's land there, and whatever a man held and wanted to keep, he had to protect for himself. The first day out, there had been whirlwind attacks by the Uzbegs and Tajiks. Attacks that seemed to blow up suddenly, like a sandstorm, to be beaten back as promptly. The second day, at break of dawn, there had been a rush by Afghans, attracted by promise of loot. It had lasted all day and Jimmie Cordie's statement, "they'll run right smack at you, old kid," was fully verified.

Now, the third day, twice since dawn, there had come an attack on all sides at once, made by Afghans, Tartars, Kirghiz, who came pouring down from the bare ragged hills, and all the rest, who seemed to have combined.

The Fighting Yid had been wounded the second day and was being carried in an improvised hammock slung between gun barrels.

The Boston Bean limped alongside of Jimmie Cordie, his head almost concealed by a bloody bandage, using a rifle as a crutch.

"Do you think we'll make it, Jimmie?" he asked.

"Darned if I know, Codfish," answered Jimmie Cordie cheerfully. "We're almost to the place, according to the Yid. All the

water we have is what we got on us. Here's a problem in higher mathematics for you. We start out with two hundred men—in three days we have half of them left and two of us out of commission. If we reach it, how long will it take us to get back—and with how many men?"

"Why is a mouse that spins?" grinned the Bean. "I think the answer is that before long the angel chorus is to be increased by several new faces. My head feels like there are two or three boiler factories operating inside of it."

"Hold 'er down here, you long-legged giraffe, and I'll pour some water on it for you."

"You will like hell! What'll you do, you poor fish?"

"Fish is good—I don't drink water. Hold 'er down."

"Heads up, Jimmie!" Grigsby shouted from the left flank. "Get to your gun!"

THE attack came on all four sides and the little column tightened in, then formed into a four-pointed star to meet it, machine guns at each point. Red Dolan with two Chinese at one, Jimmie Cordie, Putney and Grigsby at the others, with Chinese to feed them. They were all machine-gun men, taught in the hard school of the Foreign Legion and the equally hard one in the A. E. F. and the guns were perfectly handled.

The bearers knelt or stood, forming the lines between the points of the star, and fought as calmly and as coldy as the white men. They knew that if the smiling, black-eyed one, who was the "honorable elder brother" of Yen Yuan, did not come back safely, they had much better meet death with him. It would be a much shorter and easier one.

It was a deadly attack, delivered by men who counted death as an entrance into bliss. Men that knew nothing else but fighting and whose ancestors had charged home against all comers for centuries. But it was met by men with equal courage—and better weapons.

The Boston Bean sat down and began using a thirty-thirty rifle, his lean, aristocratic face as impassive as ever, even if pale now and drawn with the pain of his wound.

The Fighting Yid had promptly ordered his bearers to set him down, rolled out of the hammock, staggered to his feet, took a rifle from one of the men and, with a bullet in his left leg, high up, joined in. He used one of his bearers to lean against, much to the Taiping's disgust. The Yid, when engaged at his trade, which was fighting, always talked to himself or anyone in sight, whether they listened or not.

"Vate, mister vid de viskers," he began. "I get to you in a minute. Dare is yours—und dare is yours—and here is von for you—Oi, Jimmie! Vatch Popper knock 'em off und learn you sometings. Und dare is yours——"

Twice the horde almost reached the lines and always men who had been wounded or those whose shaggy little ponies had been shot out from under them, were crawling in over the hot sand, like wounded snakes—and just as deadly. They would be met with the long curved swords of the Taipings, which had appeared like magic from the packs.

It was a grim, merciless fight to the death, waged there on the sands of the Kyzyl-kum Desert. A fight between men who were fighters, irrespective of race, creed or color. The machine guns cut wide swathes and piled up tangled heaps of men and horses, and the rifles poured a stream of steel-jacketed bullets into the horde. But from all sides, out from behind the sand hills and out of the passes of the barrén hills that towered almost four thousand feet, came the attackers. And from the top of the hills and the sand dunes there was a steady volleying of the trade guns and quite a few modern rifles. The trade guns, carrying lead slugs, were more to be feared, as the slugs smashed through bone and muscle, tearing and crushing. Those in the charge would fire as they started, sling

their gun, draw sword or level lance, crouch in the saddle—and charge directly in the face of the guns.

And the charge was met by the tight-lipped white men, all but the Yid, who talked all the time, and the equally grim, hard faced Taiping, led by Wang Li, one of Yen Yuan's most trusted captains.

The sand between the hills and the star was covered with men and horses, mostly in groups where a burst of fire had caught them. There was a sudden lull, although the horde was massing again in a circle a thousand yards away and the sniping went steadily on. Every once in a while a man in the line would pitch forward on his face —his arms and legs twitching. The Bean got up and came over to where Jimmie Cordie was.

"Hullo, Codfish," grinned Jimmie, busy cleaning his gun. "How'd you like to be in your pa's barn just about now?"

"In my pa's barn," answered the Bean, sitting down on an ammunition box. "There is a stream of cold water flowing all——"

"You say 'er," said Jmmie firmly. "Go on, I dare you. One peep out of you about cold water and you'll be sitting on a damp cloud playing a harp, right after."

"Did you say a damp cloud?" grinned the Bean. "Gimmie a cigarette."

Red Dolan came up. "Hey, Jimmie—George says to break it up as soon as they start and never mind any cross fire stuff. Hand over them pills, Beany darlin'. How's the head of ye?"

"Go tell General Grigsby that he's teaching his grandma how to fry eggs, Mister Dolan. You better be getting back to that popgun of yours, you red-headed ape—it looks like the band was going to start playing. And don't leave it all for me to do this time, either. Tell Putt and George the same, also. And likewise, keep your eyes open when you're shootin' that gun!"

"What? Keep my eyes open, is it? I'll knock the can off ye for that, once we get home, ye shrimp!"

"Take the Beaneater on, he's a crip," answered Jimmie. "One Cordie can lick ten—get back, Red! Here they come!"

THE horde meant to wipe out the outfit that had invaded their territory, in this one charge. After that they could fight each other for the little guns that spit a continuous lance of death.

As they got in motion, the machine guns began to rattle. Jimmie Cordie, who could hold a machine gun almost as closely as a rifle, waited a moment until he saw how far Putney's fire was reaching, then picked it up from there and brought it to Red. It was a merciless defense, put up by men who were all veterans. They fought for their lives there in the Kyzyl-kum Desert—and they all knew it. Nearer and nearer came the attack, great gaps now between bunches of riders. They came steadily on, their lances and swords gleaming in the sun.

Red Dolan stood up from his gun. It had jammed on him after the fifth burst of fire. He picked up a rifle and began using it. Of all the Taiping, there were only forty-odd left on their feet—the rest were dead or wounded.

Putney's gun jammed also a moment later and he drew his Colt. Whenever Putney became hard pressed he began to croon some old song. This time it was "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emanuel's veins," and between every two or three words, his Colt raised, he threw down, and a man dropped.

The Yid stood as before, only now two of the bearers, both slightly wounded, held him up. His rifle was worth more than their two—and he was still talking. "Oi, vat lofely shootin'. Von-two—three—und von for you —vat? Am I missing? Vell, vell, you decided to fall, vot? Hold me tighter! Give me anoder gun. My, dey eat dis stuff, vat?"

The Boston Bean had begun firing with a rifle, but the constant recoil had made his head seem to burst open and he had put it down and drawn his Colt, standing there with it in his hand, trying to rally strength enough to clear away the mist before his eyes.

Grigsby and Cordie still worked their

guns methodically, swinging in a radius to take care of the half circle. Wang Li untouched, stood out in front a little, with a long curved sword in his hand. Any man that had crawled up to the line on his side unscathed, met his death. Wang Li's sword would flash out once—never twice.

Suddenly, just as it seemed that the little star would be wiped out, the charge broke, as charges do even when delivered by men who are fearless, and those that were left, wheeled their ponies and fled to the shelter of the sand hills.

As they did Grigsby shouted an order to Wang Li and stood up. The firing ceased and the six white men and those of the Taipings that were able, stood up.

"My gosh," said Cordie, "it was about time. What happened to you, Red?"

"Nothin'—she jammed on me, that's all. Are ye hurt at all, ye spridhogue?"

"Only in my feelings," answered Jimmie with a grin. "When I look around and see what's left of the ammunition. How are you, Codfish?" he went on, turning to the Boston Bean.

"Not so bad—if I could make this damn head of mine quit turning around so fast."

Red looked at him, "Goofy," he said, with deep conviction. "Never mind, Beany, acushla—I'll carry ye on me back."

"All right," called Grigsby. "Get busy."

"His master's voice," grinned Jimmie. "Stay and take care of the Duke of Boston, Red. Get the Yid over here first. He looks all in."

"He is," agreed Red, looking over to where the Yid was sitting, swaying back and forth. Red went over to him. "Come to daddy, ye fat omadhaun. 'Tis like a mattress ye are, tied in the middle. Up ye go, Abie darlin'," and he lifted the Yid, as a mother would a child, in his brawny arms.

"Big Irish bum," jeered the Yid, as he rose in Red's arms. "Me und Jimmie vill from you knock—Oi, I am down and out and all in. Easy mit de leg, I esk you."

"Shut the trap of ye," commanded Red. "Or I'll roll you across the sand for the wildmen to play wid. Are ye hurt bad Abie, acushla?"

Jimmie, with Grigsby and Putney, counted ammunition and collected all the water bags. "I'm of the personal opinion," Jimmie said with a grin, "that this is rapidly getting to be a place that is not so good. If they come once more, the ammunition will be most distinctively all, gents!"

"And that's the time, Mr. Cordie," answered Putney, "that you showed if you had only fifty per cent more brains, you'd be half human. George, I think the best thing we can do is to back trail, *pronto* and in haste—and keep on that way as long as possible. I hate to crab the party, but it don't look as if we could get much further."

"What?" demanded Red. "After lickin' them scuts? Are ye goofy too, Putt?"

Grigsby grinned. "If we've licked 'em, Red, they don't know it. We better go on, Putt. No water on the way back and there may be——"

"On, the fire!" called Jimmie Cordie, jumping for his gun. "On the left! Give 'em hell, Wang Li!"

THIS time there was no attempt to encircle—the remainder of the horde, about two hundred men, charged in a wedge shaped column, led by an old man with a long flowing beard. He was riding a big stallion and loomed above his followers who mostly were on the shaggy Mongolian ponies. He stood in his stirrups like a Cossack, his sword held as in the position of "right cut against infantry." Back of him, spreading out on the lines of the wedge, about ten deep, came the Afghans, Tartars, Uzbegs and Kirghiz, brother fighting man now, until the loot was secured.

Grigsby and Putney were at their guns almost as soon as Jimmie. Grigsby fired one belt—reached for another—but there was no Taiping to hand it to him! Both had been reached by the snipers on the hill tops. Grigsby stood up for a second, to step clear of the bodies, and reached for an ammunition box, looking over to where Jimmie Cordie was working his gun with Red.

The Boston Bean still stood with his Colt in his right hand, his left holding his head as if to stop it going around. Grigsby saw the Fighting Yid, lying prone on the sand, still pumping his Winchester and still talking. As he stooped for the box, he saw Putney, standing as if on a rifle range, using a 30.30, his face as calm as ever. The Taiping were lying and kneeling as before, among the bodies of their brothers. Wang Li was standing in the middle of them, watching the advance of the horde.

As Grigsby straightened up, the side of his face suddenly became curtained in blood and he fell sideways over the bodies of the men at his feet.

One machine gun left in commission now—Jimmie Cordie's—and he was shooting it with all his skill. He had seen George Grigsby go down out of the corner of his eye, as Red hooked on a belt for him and now, the smile was gone from his lips and he shot, bringing all he had ever learned of machine-gun work to bear, coldly and accurately. He started at the point of the wedge, ran down the side opposite to him, as a gardner would send the water from a hose on a border of flowers. Then back and down again. But even a machine gun bullet must stop when it hits and these men were chunkily built, hard-muscled, and wore heavy sheepskin clothes. A bullet would not go through them and into the next man, as it would through a half-naked, illy-nourished, savage or a much slighter, thin-bodied Chinese. Men would go down, as did their horses, carrying other horses and men with them. The men if they could, would crawl out of the welter and continue the charge on foot. The rest never faltered but came on, to ride over these strangers who had killed so many of their tribesmen.

The rifles of the Taipings were taking toll, and every time Putney or the Yid shot, a man fell from his saddle. The old man leading, by one of the strange freaks of battle, was not touched. He came on, followed now by less than fifty men and as they got to within a hundred feet, he shouted in exultation and waved his sword over his head. The stallion he was riding was stark crazy and was running, his head far out, his lips curled back, the long yellow teeth showing through the foam.

JIMMIE CORDIE fired one burst—then another, almost under the hoofs of the horses, and stood up, drawing his Colt.

Red Dolan sent a bullet through the brain of the stallion when he was within ten feet of them and the big horse, killed in the middle of a jump, turned a complete somersault, throwing his rider over his head. The old man lit behind Jimmie Cordie, and as Red parried a blow from the sword of the next man, whose horse had been killed by the last burst, and closed with him, Jimmie turned to where the old man had fallen. There was no one on his front, most of the horde left had hit the line further down and were being met more than halfway by the Taipings, who were as fight crazy as the tribesmen.

As Jimmie faced him, the old man, dizzy from his hard fall, raised up on his elbow and his sword swung in an arc like a flash of blued steel lightning. But Jimmie Cordie had been raised in a hard school, where men were taught that a wounded man was often more dangerous than a man on his feet. As the old man's wrist turned, Jimmie stepped back a half step. As the blade point passed him, he stepped in, his Colt hammer beginning to rise. Now he was on the old man's right side, so close that the sword arm could not be brought back. The grim face of the old Tartar glared up into his, unafraid, and he tried to twist the sword so that he could thrust sideways with the point. Jimmie Cordie, who had fought and killed for years, without a thought if the man killed was a fighting enemy, did a surprising thing. The hammer went down again from almost half cock and he struck the old man across the side of the head with the barrel. It was not a hard blow, but hard enough to knock what remaining sense he had out of him and he sank back on the sand.

Red Dolan had parried the blow aimed at

him and had crashed the butt of his rifle squarely between the eyes of the Afghan. The Boston Bean, his head cleared by the shock of the hand to hand fighting, was using his Colt. The Yid, hit by the fallen body of a man, was lying still. Putney was beside Wang Li, he had dropped his Colt after emptying it and was using a sword.

Jimmie Cordie stood in a practically cleared space. "Shoot 'em away from Putt!" he said calmly. "Red! Drop that gun! Use your Colt!"

"Colt hell!" snarled Red. "I'm goin' meself," and with the rifle, its butt now shattered, Red Dolan ran to the milling mass of men, in the center of which was Wang Li, Putney and ten of the Taiping. Around them eddied thirty-odd of the horde—all that was left.

The Bean started to follow. "Stay here, fool," Jimmie shouted, raising his Colt. "We can do better——" and his Colt began to send death to those of the horde on the outside. They fell, one by one, as he fired. The Bean stopped and joined in. They were both men who could put six bullets in a playing card at revolver range and now they were shooting to clear Putney.

The men pushing in paid absolutely no attention to those falling beside them. They got into striking distance and killed or were killed. But the two deadly revolvers could not be withstood and the tribesmen melted away. As Jimmie started to reload for the second time, there was a flurry, a flashing of sword blades, a surge forward and Putney, Wang Li and three of the Taipings staggered across the dead bodies in font of them, their swords dripping blood.

Putney came slowly up to where Jimmie and the Bean were. He had been wounded in several places and was carrying himself on his nerve. He stopped and looked gravely at Jimmie Cordie.

"Old kid," he said, slowly and distinctly, "I just wanted to tell you that you were plumb right. They run right smack——" He pitched forward and would have fallen if Jimmie hadn't caught him and eased him down.

"Steady does it, old settler," said Jimmie. "Hang tough, Putt. You'll be—my God! Where's Red?"

"Under the pile, probably," answered the bean, weakly. His head was beginning to turn again, this time worse than ever.

Jimmie Cordie started over to where the bodies lay the thickest, to be halted and turned by a yell from the Fighting Yid, who had come to under the bodies of the men who had fallen on him, and had wiggled his way out to a sitting up position. "Oi, Jimmie! Look! Oi! Dey got Red! Over dare! Knock 'em off, Jimmie!" and the Fighting Yid tried to get to a rifle.

Chapter III

"Look what the redheaded ape was packing!"

FOUR horsemen, leading another horse, across which there sprawled the big form of Red Dolan, were almost in the shelter of a hill, a thousand feet away. Red had reached the fight, been swung around in the milling to the side away from Jimmie and the Bean, killed the first two men that struck at him and the next second had gone down from the heavy hilt of a sword on the temple. The men nearest to him had promptly quit trying to get in to the fight any more and had crawled to where they could pick up horses, dragging Red with them, thrown his unconscious body across a pony and were heading for the hills. They knew that the prospect of loot had disappeared, and without question figured that a ransom would be paid for the man they carried. If not, they would have something to show for the loss of tribesmen and if Red remained alive, something to make pay by torture.

Jimmie Cordie and Wang Li picked up rifles and Jimmie shot twice. It was all he had time to do. Two saddles were empty as the little party turned into the hill, out of sight. Wang Li had either missed or hit the same man Jimmie had.

The sniping suddenly ceased from the

hills and Jimmie knew that they had come down to see what kind of a man it was that had been brought from the battle.

"I will get horses, oh honorable elder brother," said Wang Li, "and we will go for the war-lord of the flaming hair."

"No we won't," said Jimmie calmly, although his lips were gray. "There's wounded men here, Wang Li. If the war-lord is alive, he won't be hurt, yet. We will see that all is done here that we must do —then we will go, you and I. But for that offer, oh captain of warriors, you are my brother always. Get water and open up the package marked with the red cross."

Jimmie went over to where Putney lay and lifted him up, then over on his back, putting a gun butt under his head. There was a deep cut on his left arm up near the shoulder, two not so deep on his left forearm, a glancing sword had laid his scalp open on the right side and there was another cut straight down his ribs on the left side that ran from his collar bone to his shortrib. None of them were serious, except for the amount of blood they had let out of him.

Jimmie, with the help of Wang Li, gave him first aid, put a coat under his head and left him there on the hot sand. There was no place to take him. "I got it some brandy mit my pack," said the Yid, crawling over. "I gif it to him, Jimmie."

"You will? Come here, you Yid wildcat, and get fixed up yourself. My gosh, how many holes have you got in you?"

The first-aiding of the Yid was accompanied by many voluble protests. "Oi, Jimmie, easy mit de iodine! Oi, my persecuted race! Quit vid de fingar! Oi, gif a drink before you cut it ouit, Jimmie, I esk you!"

One of the bullets had gone through the fleshy part of the forearm and was just beneath the skin on the other side.

"Sit tight then," Jimmie said, opening a bottle of whisky that was in the Red Cross case. "Here, drink hearty, while I sharpen up the knives and the saw."

"Vat?" yelled the Yid. "A saw? Oi, for vot, Jimmie?"

The Boston Bean came over and stood gravely watching Jimmie operate on the Yid.

"Cut his head off just below the ear," he suggested. He had stopped holding his head and his Colt was holstered, but his eyes showed that the real Winthrop had gone away somewhere. Jimmie looked at him for a second, then said, "I will in a few minutes. You go and see if you can find a pail or something to hold the blood."

The Bean considered this for a moment. "That's a good idea," he said. "Then after you cut it off I'll use it. The top of mine has gone, see?" and he bent his head.

"Sure you can," said the Yid, game to the core. In spite of his pain, he was trying to help Jimmie Cordie. "Go get it de pail."

The Bean turned away without saying anything else and began pawing over the equipment.

"Vell," said the Yid, as Jimmie tightened the last bandage, "now ve got it a goofy, ain't it?"

"He'll come to," answered Jimmie. "Put this bird down by the other one, Wang Li and then we'll—well, for Pete's sake! Welcome to our fair city, Mr. Grigsby."

GRIGSBY had come up to them, still a little uncertain on his feet, white of face, with caked blood on his neck and head, but otherwise sane and all together. The bullet, a steel-jacketed one, fired at long range, had hit him, glanced from his skull, torn it's way across his head, laying the skin open and out. The result was just as if he had been creased. It had knocked him cold for a long time.

"It looks to me more like a cross section of hell," Grigsby answered, with a rather weak grin. "Where's Red?"

"Gone on a visit with some of our recent playmates," answered Jimmie. "Wang Li and I are going after him as soon as I get the hospital organized. Step up, you're next."

"You go easy," commanded Grigsby.

"My head feels like if anyone touched it, it would break up in small pieces!"

Ten minutes later, they sat by Jimmie's gun, which was ready to hurl out defiance at any further attack. Putney was conscious now, the strong brandy taking effect. He was sucking on concentrated beef cubes and already the color was coming back in his face. The Yid was propped up against a box also with a bottle near him. Grigsby's head felt better and he was able to sit down on a box alongside of Jimmie Cordie.

The Bean had come back to them and after announcing that he couldn't find a pail, sat crosslegged in the sand, at Jimmie's left.

Jimmie looked at him. "Never mind," he said, "I'll find one for you. What's that on your Colt butt?" and he reached over and took it from the holster. "Oh—nothing but dirt! I thought it was a gob of something!" and he held the Colt in his hand, swinging it around by the trigger guard. He did not return it to the Bean. Wang Li and the three Taiping were busy among their own wounded. All of a sudden the Yid said, "Oi! vat——" then stopped. He was facing in the direction of Wang Li.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Jimmie. "Bandage slip?"

"No—it vos—I got it a pain, ain't it. It's gone now."

"Yeah? Well, keep your pains to yourself while we dope something out. We can't stay here, that's a cinch."

"Collect all the wounded," said Grigsby, "and get to the nearest hills, fight our way into water, and hole up!

"That's all we can do—and the quicker we do it the better. We might dig in here but it would be a case of no water pretty soon and the wounded would catch hell in this sun. They'll gang up again. It's a thousand yards to that baby over on the right."

Wang Li, leading ten of the Taiping, all with roughly bade bandages on their arms or legs or heads, came slowly forward. The three men that came through the fight walking with him.

"Lord," he said, bowing to Jimmie Cordie. "Give orders. These brothers of mine can still use a rifle—and it may be a sword for a few minutes." He was a pure Manchu, this young war captain of Yen Yuan, and had been much with the English in Hong Kong and Pekin. "The rest," he added calmy, "have ascended on high, taking their seats with their venerable ancestors."

"Mit your assistance," muttered the Yid, as Jimmie spoke. It was just as well that Wang Li did not hear him. He had done what was considered his duty, both by himself and the men who were so badly wounded. He had put them out of their misery and started them in all honor on their journey.

"We have here two wounded men, Oh brother," answered Jimmie, "and we must make the hills. We must carry one machine gun, rifles ammunition, food and water. Sit down with us in council."

WANG LI bowed, his face lighting up with pride. He knew what that invitation meant—and the Taiping with him knew also. It meant that if they got back, his place among the million and more Taiping would be among the highest. "Lord, I am not worthy to sit in your magnificent presence."

"You have my permission," said Jimmie gravely, handing over an empty box. Wang Li sat down, his followers standing beside and behind him.

"I am not of the brotherhood," went on Jimmie. "But these men who are wounded? Are they not my fighting brothers? Let them sit on the stand!" Up to that time Jimmie Cordie had been protected and guarded because of Yen Yuan's orders, but from then on, all through the Taiping, which ranged from the highest to the lowest in China, he was served for himself also.

Wang Li snarled an order and the wounded sat down, the three unwounded standing back of him.

"Get going," Putney said suddenly.

"Never mind any more talk. I can walk if you take it slow."

"Und I can crawl," declared the Yid. "Mit von more drink I can fly, I bet you."

"Make up light packs," said Grigsby, "food and water, fill our belts, each man take a rifle. Take your gun down, Jimmie, Wang Li's men can pack it. You take as much ammunition as you can pack. We advance a hundred yards, stop, go back and bring up Putt and the Yid, then forward again for another. Wang Li and I will do the bringing up stuff and you can cover us."

"All right, except that taking down business. We'll carry her as is, until we get in the clear. Make a portage of it—a hundred yards at a crack. We can get more stuff into the hills that way."

The Boston Bean suddenly pulled his legs under him and crouched, half up from the ground. "Gimme my head!" he snarled, and launched himself straight at the Yid. It was fast but Jimmie Cordie's action was faster. As the Bean's body shot past him, he twisted the Colt he still had in his hand and the barrel struck the Bean just above the ear. There was force enough in the blow to throw the Bean off his lunge and roll him unconscious on the sand a foot away from the Yid.

"What the hell's coming off?" demanded Grigsby.

"Nuts," explained Jimmie calmly. "He's been that way off and on all day. If he'd hit the Yid he'd have busted open his wounds."

"So you apply a counter irritant?" Putney grinned.

"Yeah boy, and save the Yid's bacon all at the same time. The Bean was knocked goofy—maybe that'll knock him all right."

"Anyway, it's given us one more to carry," said Grigsby. "Let's get going."

"Look!" the Yid shouted. "Behind you, Jimmie!"

Jimmie Cordie turned, as did the rest. The Bean's Colt was again ready for action.

The old Tartar that had ridden the stallion and been knocked out by Jimmie, was staggering to his feet. His hands were groping aimlessly at his belt for a weapon that was not there.

"Don't shoot," Jimmie Cordie said, getting up and starting over toward him. The old Tartar saw him coming and made a desperate effort to clear his befogged brain. Jimmie halted when he got to within four feet of him.

"Put 'em up!" he commanded, at the same time raising his left hand above his head. That command, delivered in almost any language, when backed by weapons, is understood, and the old man, after a quick glance around, slowly obeyed. Jimmie motioned with the gun toward the others and the old man promptly started over.

When they arrived, Grigsby said, "What are you going to do with your boy friend?"

"Darned if I know?" admitted Jimmie. "Maybeso swap him for Red."

"Yeah? Well, let's get going. Load him up with ammunition."

THE old man made no objection, and after watching the rest for a moment, he lifted one of the one hundred pound boxes to his shoulder. As he did, one of the Taipings brushed against him, very slightly. The old man turned and snarled something. The Taiping put down the box he was carrying and drew his long curved sword. The Tartar grasped the box and raised it above his head, ready to throw. Wang Li, who saw it, shouted an order and the Taiping sheathed his sword, picked up his box and started. After a minute, the old man lowered the box and stalked along.

At the first halt, Jimmie Cordie went back with Grigsby and three of the Taiping. The Yid, Putney and Wang Li staying. When they returned with the Bean, who was still unconscious, Jimmie Cordie had the Tartar's sword. He went up to the old man, bowed and held it out, hilt first.

"Oi, such a business," said the Yid. "For vat you do dot, Jimmie? Now, go und find a rattler und gif him first two bites."

"Shut up, nitwit," whispered Putney, beside him. "Jimmie's up to something."

The Tarter looked at Jimmie, then at his sword, then held out his hand and took it. Jimmie motioned to one of the boxes, sat down himself for a moment. The old man watched him grimly until he had risen again, then went and sat down on the box Jimmie had pointed to, his sword across his knees.

"Vat is it?" said the Yid in a stage whisper. "Jimmie makes him a passenger, ain't it. Maybe he comes over here at us? Ven he does, I crocks him before he gets started mit de pig-sticker."

It was a long, hard job, the bringing up of the stuff and transferring the wounded, but they stayed grimly with it. From the first time on, Jimmie stayed with the machine gun. But there was no need. The hills were still and there was no attack of any kind. The old Tartar made no offer to help, neither did he show any hostile intent. He advanced when they did, and sat on a box near Jimmie when the rest went back for more. He ignored the Taipings and they him. That was all. It was late in the afternoon when they came to the hill, not even dusk yet, but rapidly getting that way. As they came close, they could see a cut or gorge running in, with side walls about a thousand feet high.

"Hold 'er', commanded Grigsby. "Heap plenty fine place for an ambush. Maybeso that's why our little playmates have been so quiet and let us get this far. Somebody's got to take a look see."

Wang Li volunteered to go, with the three unwounded Taiping, two on each side. As they started, the rest sat down to wait. The ten Taiping spread out, those that could handle rifles took them, the rest with their swords. The man the Tartar had spoken to, had evidently told the rest something as there were a good many black looks cast in his direction and quite a little talk. The old man ignored it all.

"We can ease in—" began Jimmie—he stopped; being interrupted by a yell from the Yid.

"Oi look! Dar is de castle over dare! See, on de little hill in de middle of de two big vons on de right. See, he said it was by a hill mit rocks on de top dat looks like a castle!"

"My gosh!" said Jimmie Cordie, looking in the direction the Yid was pointing. "It does look like a castle at that—or I'm getting goofy too."

"You always were," answered Grigsby with a grin. "Well, when Wang Li gets back, we'll ease over that way. If the tomb is there we can——"

"If de tomb is dare? Oi, George, vat a vay to talk. Sure de tomb is dare—und if it isn't, vat a swell place to make it a stand."

"You said something that time, Yid," agreed Jimmie. "If we can win to that hill where the castle is, all hell couldn't pry us loose."

"Until our water and ammunition are gone, you mean," put in Putney.

"Naturally, I mean until that happens," said Jimmie curtly. So curtly that Grigsby looked at him in surprise, then said gently, "Easy does it, Jimmie. Red's all right, and we'll go get him."

"I don't know whether he's all right or not," answered Jimmie. "But I do know one thing, and that is as soon as I get you birds in out of the wet, I'm going out and find out."

Wang Li and the men with him came came back. "No one on either side, Lord," he reported to Jimmie Cordie. "We went to the top."

"All right, then—let's go," Grigsby said. "What are you going to do with the seven Sutherland sisters brother, Jimmie?"

"Pack him right along. He can talk so that one of the Taiping understands. Wang Li can translate. I may be able to get a line on where Red is."

THEY made it to the hill where the rocks on top looked like some medieval robber baron's hold. It took quite a while. No attempt was made to hurry, plenty of time taken out to rest and never for a

moment was the vigilance relaxed. As they came into a little valley, the hill loomed up ahead of them, a little on the left.

There on one side of a smaller hill, almost in front of the castled one, about fifty feet up, in the middle of a bare swath that was plainly made by a landslide, was—the black mouth of a hole going in! It was a climb of about forty-five degrees angle and by the time they made it, carrying the Bean, Putney, who had collapsed once more and the fighting Yid, plus the fact that Grigsby played out halfway through, it was dark.

THE opening was about ten feet high by twelve wide and the solid blocks of stone that made what was the roof were set on upright stone blocks, set tightly together by some kind of cement or mortar. The floor was made of square blocks of stone and as even as a billiard table. It was absolutely black after the first ten feet and the floor seemed to take a sharp pitch downward. The air was much cooler than outside and seemed dryer.

"Hole up here in the entrance," commanded Jimmie Cordie, as the last load was brought in. "We can do all the exploring later. George can you work this gun with the Taiping to help you?"

"Yeah, boy," answered Grigsby. "Putt will be all right again in a little while and the Yid can do some shooting right now if necessary, can't you, Yid?"

"Vot, can't I?" answered the game little Jew. "Esk me und vatch Popper. Prop me up by de opening und vatch."

"I can also," said a faint voice behind him. "I wish someone would tell me just what happened."

"Oi," yelled the Yid. "Beaneater, you is back, vat?"

"Back, hell," said the faint voice. "I haven't ever been away."

"Fair enough," said Jimmie. "The Codfish is returned. Now, Wang Li, lets you and me go outside with my friend here and see what we can get. You take the deck, George?"

"I got it," answered Grigsby. "Come back before you start, Jimmie."

"I will—and before I go to administer the third degree to my new found friend I want to ask the Yid what he thinks now about the bunch that jumped Johann not finding this place. Look at the mess around in front. She's cleaner than a rabbit, I bet you. Your Dutch friend didn't throw enough dirt over the hole, Yid."

"Vell," admitted the Yid. "It looks dat vay, Jimmie—mit dose cart tracks und de busted veels und vat not. But anyway ve found it shade and coolness und a place to rest, ain't it?"

"That's right," answered Jimmie as he started, "and right now all that's worth a damn sight more to us than all Jagatai's loot."

The old Tartar accompanied them without any objection, and as they went out in the semi-darkness, the Yid called, "Jimmie—keep the finger on the Colt und vatch de big sword!"

Five minutes later Jimmie and Wang Li came back. Grigsby had given Putney a drink, and now Putney was conscious once more. "Where is he, Jimmie? Did you kill him?" asked Grigsby, not seeing the old man.

"No, we let him go. He could speak Chinese. He is or was top-cutter of an outfit, but we mopped up on most of them. He said that there is no regular village around here and damn little water. He doesn't know where or who got Red. I think he's a damn liar myself, so I turned him loose."

"Why?" asked Grigsby.

"Oh, hell!" answered Jimmie. "Figure it out yourself. Where's Red's pack? He's got a flashlight in there I want."

"Over there by the gun," Grigsby answered. "I suppose you know you are going to your death, Jimmie?"

"If my number is up—and not unless," answered Jimmie, pawing over Red's pack. "And I don't give a damn if I am. Red will be looking for me to—well, for Pete's sake," and for the first time since Red was taken, Jimmie Cordie grinned. "Look what that redheaded ape was packing!" and he held up four Mills bombs. "My gosh, with

these and—come on, Wang Li. Take a rifle and a Colt."

"Load your belts, Jimmie," said Grigsby. "You may need all you can carry."

"Give me yours, Yid. You got a full one. Hurry up, he's getting too far ahead of us. Let's go."

"Who is?" asked the Yid, as he passed over his full belt, having had one of the Taipings fill his up with shells right after the last attack.

"Why the old man, you damn fool. Why do you think I let him loose?" answered Jimmie, as he disappeared.

Chapter IV

"Here's a little light for you!"

WHEN Red Dolan regained consciousness, he was lying on the ground on what felt like bare rock. That it was some place way up on the top of a hill he could see by the moonlight which was just strong enough to distinguish large objects. His hands and feet were not bound, and save for a dull ache at his right temple he was unhurt. His iron body had withstood the jarring of the ride across the back of a horse without strain or bruise.

Around him in a circle sat men most of them crosslegged. Back of them stood others. There was a cleared space about ten feet across in the midst of the encircling figures that neither moved nor spoke as Red first sat up, then got to his feet. Where he was or what had happened after he had killed the man in the fight and then felt something as if the heavens had suddenly dropped and hit him, he didn't know. That he was alone, surrounded by enemies and unarmed made no difference to Red Dolan. His one thought was to get to the man nearest to him, take his sword away from him and fight the rest. As he tensed his body for the rush, the circle around him melted away, as far as sitting men went. It was as if they sensed that the big red-headed man standing there was as dangerous as a sabre-toothed tiger and was only to be met by men with weapons ready and on their feet. A man, big almost as Red, whose body seemed to be great rolls of fat, with long drooping mustache, his sheepskin coat removed, stepped in front of the others, and faced Red. He was a Tartar and the sword held in his fat, hairy right hand was a Persian *talwar,* whose blade showed, even in the moonlight, the damascening of a sword of price.

Suddenly the moon, what there was of it, went behind a cloud and it became dark, with the black velvety darkness of the north. There was a moment's confusion, a shouting of orders in different tongues and with it the crash of falling bodies and the tinkle of a blade on rock. Red had crouched and sent his two hundred and thirty pounds of hard muscle with all his strength in a flying tackle at the big man in front of him. His shoulder hit just above the knees and his arms went around the legs of the Tartar like the closing of the jaws of a vise. The man went down as if struck by a shell, his sword dropping. The force of the tackle sent both of them rolling over and over into the milling feet of the men nearest to them. Red's weight, plus that of the Tartar, plus the force with which they were rolling, made them like some old Juggernaut car. Before they stopped rolling there were three or four men knocked down and one or two across them.

Red, having played football in the old days when they played football, and not a ladylike game of throwing a ball around and tagging each other, let go of the Tartar, who was completely out, heaved at the bodies of the men on him and came out of the pile like a Jack-in-the-box, only to dive for the nearest legs to him and gather them in.

Mr. Dolan formerly of the Foreign Legion, the A. E. F. and points west, was in his element. As a rough-house battler he was, as the Yid had once said, "a dirty fighter," and at the moment he was not holding back anything he had, either. The men trying for him were handicapped. They didn't know that kind of fighting, it was

dark, they had to be at least a little careful as to who they cut at, if they didn't want a blood feud afterward.

RED was handicapped by no such considerations, and as he heaved up with the legs he had gathered in, he let go, kicked at a man, butted another, reached out an arm, felt a body, drew it to him, jabbed up with his two fingers held stiff to where he thought the eyes might be, let go, jammed his knee up hard in another man's belly, went down on his knees and dove straight through the surrounding legs, which faded away on either side.

The men against him were good men, all fighting men and all eager to close with Red. Any one of them could and would have ended it with one cut. But doing that in the dark, with a two hundred and thirty pound Irishman, who loved fighting, throwing himself around like a wounded boa constrictor, was not easily done. After the last bucking of the line, Red felt that he was through the press. It was dark and he couldn't see, but he no longer felt—and smelled—the bodies around him.

He got on his feet—and fight drunk, turned to charge back. As he did, some one bumped into him. Red promptly gathered the newcomer in, and as his arms went around him, his hand closed on the hilt of a sword, over another hand. The main strained against Red, at the same time yelling loudly. He had been sideways to Red when he bumped him, but in reaching for him, Red had turned him so they were face to face. Red's left hand closed on the man's throat and his right slipped down over the hand on the sword hilt to the wrist. His hip came against the hip of the struggling yelling man and he heaved up, once. The yelling and struggling ceased and when Red let go, the man's sword had dropped and he followed it, his head way over on his shoulder. Red had broken his neck with a twist as the weight of the body had come on it. He stooped, picked up the sword and jumped into the darkness. His feet hit solid rock the first time, sloping down and he crouched and ran down the side of the hill. About thirty feet more he ran full tilt into a ledge that stuck directly up and the only thing that saved him from a cracked skull was the fact that he was holding his sword hand out a little. As it was it stunned him and he stumbled to his knees. As he did, his left hand, flung out to break the fall, went into an opening in the rock. He just had sense enough left to feel around. It seemed to be a crack of some kind, big enough to hold him and Red crawled in. It ran back about five feet and was not quite long enough to allow him to stretch out. The height was barely sufficient to clear his shoulders as he lay on his side.

Torches had been lit now, up on the hill top and there was a lot of running around and loud talking.

"Talk on, me buckos," Red said aloud. "'Tis clear of ye I am. As soon as I get me head to stop buzzin', I'll take me good sword here and come up to ye and then—and then—I'll go find Jimmie—the——" Red's head went down on his arm and he passed out of the picture.

Hence he did not see that there was a bunching together of the torches on the hill. Several that had been farther out, as if the holders had been starting a search, came back in. The whole thing, from the time Red stood up and was confronted by the fat man, had not taken five minutes.

INTO the light cast by the torches strode the old Tartar that Jimmie had released. Several other Tartars at once closed in behind him. The Afghans, Uzbegs, Tajiks and Kirghiz, to the number of about thirty, got together also.

"Where is he?" snarled the old man, in a bastard mixture that they all seemed to understand.

"Lord," answered one of the Tartars, "he was here, lying quiet. Then suddenly he became possessed with a million devils.

See, Lord, what he has done to us. Then, in the darkness when we could not see to strike—he flew away!"

"Fools!" shouted the old man. "He was worth many rifles and they would have given the little guns that spit death for him. Out and search—shall he hide from a hill-man and a rider? Get fresh torches. Go far out and drive in—soon it will be light! Go without fear. His friends are driven into a hole."

"Here's a little light for you!" said a mocking voice from behind, on the same side the old man had come up the hill.

The old man, with no thought of being followed, had gone slowly up in the hills, still dizzy and shaken from his fall and Jimmie's blow on the head. Wang Li and Jimmie had caught up with him without trouble—and arrived with him, a little while back.

At the sound of the voice, which they could not understand, the entire party on the hill top turned, and hands went to sword hilts.

Even as they did so, a Mills bomb detonated almost in the center of the massed men. It blew them literally apart, men falling away in all directions. Before the flash of the first bomb had died out, another landed and exploded among the remnant of the tribesmen. The old man pitched forward, half of his head blown off. The torches were down now, some burning on the rock, but none held up. Just enough light for those left, now frantic with fear at the devils that had appeared to burn and tear them, to see two forms come over the brow of the hill, one with streaks of fire coming from an outheld arm, the other, with a long curved blade that shimmered in the flickering light.

Ten or twelve tribesmen—all that were left—yelled in an agony of fear, turned, and fled blindly down the hill. Just then the dawn broke, clear and lovely.

Jimmie Cordie and Wang Li stood for a moment, looking down on the dead bodies, and the wounded who were trying to roll out of the sight of the demons who had the form of men.

"Turn some of those piles over," said Jimmie. "Red may have been killed before the——"

A wild Irish yell of exultation came rolling up the hill and following it came Red Dolan. He had been brought to consciousness by the two detonations of the Mills' bombs, and on cautiously peeking out of his hole up, had seen Jimmie and Wang Li just as the dawn came.

"Jimmie!" he yelled as he came. "Jimmie, ye scut!"

Cordie's grim, tight-drawn face became once more calm and smiling. It was as if some magician had wiped it clean. He holstered his Colt and stood there, one hand on his hip, and waited for Red.

"We didn't wake you up, did we, Mr. Dolan?" he asked, as Red got up to them.

"Ye did, ye shrimp of the world," answered Red. "And damn glad I am ye did. Sure now, 'tis once I'm glad to see the homely face of ye. Are ye hurt, Jimmie darlin'?"

"I am not. Everything is all right now—you damn red-headed baboon. My gosh, you look like the curse of Brian Boru, you big cheese. What do you mean by——"

" 'Tis right," interrupted Red. "I feel the same about ye, Jimmie, alanna. Where do the rest be now?"

"At a summer resort near here. Let's get going."

"Right away, Jimmie. Sure now, Wang Li, ye highbinder. I owe ye wan, for comin' wid Jimmie. 'Tis me that will pay it some——"

"Cut the wah-wah out and move out," said Jimmie. "They may rally and we've got a hell of a way to go."

"Wait till I swap me sword here for that wan wid the pretty handle," said Red. "Sure now, ye stole me bombs, ye robber!"

"Stole hell," grinned Jimmie. "We hoped you were dead and divided up your kit. The Yid got your shaving set."

"He did—and it will be about wan minute after I get back that he'll keep it. Come on wid ye—wait a minute, do ye know which way to go now, Jimmie?"

"Yeah, we made trail sign. Carry these

belts, you big moose—and this rifle, as well as 'me good sword.' I'm about all in."

"Jimmie! Now why the hell didn't ya say so, ye grinning gibboon. I'll carry you, wid all the——"

"You will not—go first, Wang Li."

Chapter V

"I'll pack 'em all three!"

A LITTLE after daylight, the Yid, who was sitting propped up against one of the big entrance stones, let out a yell.

"Oi! Come see! Here comes Jimmie mit Red! He got him! Und Wang Li mit dem! Now, by golly, ve give dem hell vonce more, ain't it?"

Grigsby and the Bean, who had been sitting further back, came to the entrance. Putney, whose clean, hard, well conditioned body, helped by the dry, cool air, was rapidly rallying from the effect of the cuts, turned and inched himself over so that he could see the three men coming up the hill.

"Mr. Dolan didn't want to leave his friends so soon," said Jimmie, as they came up, "but we persuaded him to come and visit us for a little while."

"Yeah?" said Grigsby. "Well, we are glad to see Mr. Dolan—all in one piece. I think, in honor of his arrival, we will all take one small drink."

"After which," Jimmie Cordie went on, "Mr. Dolan will entertain by explaining just why he quits work and goes horseback riding in the middle of the shift."

"And so would ye, shrimp, if ye knew no more about it than I did. Here I was, havin a fine time, and all of a sudden somepin' hits me and——"

"There you wasn't!" finished Jimmie for him.

Later, Jimmie and Grigsby sat outside the hole, while Red was telling the rest about what happened to him and Wang Li was doing the same with the Taiping.

"I don't want hang any crape on the festive proceedings," Jimmie said to Grigsby, "but let's get down to cases. Putt is coming along all right; so is the Yid. The Boston Bean is sane at the minute but liable to go bats again any time. Neither one of the three can stand the gaff. The Taiping are all shot to hell except Wang Li. That leaves you, Red, Wang Li, and Mr. Cordie's son, Jimmie. You follow me, Mr. Grigsby?"

"I'm ahead of you, Mr. Cordie—keep right on!" answered Grigsby gravely.

"As you urge me to do so I will," grinned Jimmie. "We have enough ammunition to last about ten minutes for the Colt plus what we have for the small arms in general, which isn't more than two thousand rounds all told. The food question doesn't enter in—there is plenty. But the water question is sticking up like a sore thumb. You agree, Mr. Grigsby?"

"Fully, fully—continue with your remarks, me good man."

"I will. We are now some three days' march in Kyzyl-kum Desert at the tomb of the late Mr. Jagatai Khan. It is quite obvious, Mr. Grigsby, that some one arrived before us—after the said Mr. Johann left. When we started we had two hundred perfectly good Taiping fighting men, four machine guns, and what we thought would be plenty of ammunition, water and sichlike. Plus that we all had good health. I'll bet nine dollars that this place is as bare as Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Question in front of the class—how long can we stay here before we start to fight our way back? Our late playmates will come to call on us again and——"

"You are slipping, teacher," grinned Grigsby. "They have already come. Look on the surrounding hills. Cut the comedy, Jimmie. Only thing I can see to do is to hole up here until the wounded are better, then strip down to fighting weight and shoot our way out. We got all the water bags and there's enough to last a week. If you ask me, we're damn lucky we got here.

Jimmie grinned. "What we got handed to us up to date is like the gentle patter of a summer shower on the old tin roof,

old kid, compared with a tornado, when they really get ganged up—which they will do now. George, no kiddin', we got just as much chance of cutting our way out of here as a snowball in hell."

"What do you care," yawned Grigsby. "We're all together and it's a cinch we got to go sometime. Why not now, Jeems?"

"No reason—except I've got a few heavy dates to keep first, if I can—well, something may break. It's on the knees of the Nine Red Gods, anyway. Let's get in and take a look-see down the hole."

"I'LL go wid ye, Jimmie," announced Red promptly, when they went in and told the rest they were going to explore down the sloping shaft.

"I'll go too," said the Bean firmly.

"You will not," said Jimmie, just as firmly. "You are liable to go goofy any minute, you poor piece of brown bread. Hell of a nice thing if you jumped at us down there and tried to take the tops of our heads for yourself, wouldn't it? You stay in the hospital, you hear me?"

"You and Red go," Putney said. "George can stay here as chief nurse and be ready to knock the Bean cold. Don't you try for my head, Beany, if you——"

"Oi," yelled the Yid. "Dot only leaves me und vonce before he did it?"

"Aw," defended the Bean, "I was nuts then. Now I'm all right."

"If you are," said Jimmie, as he and Red started with two flashlights, "you are promoted to be chief cook and bottle washer. Get busy on those tins. If you birds hear three shots, rally around the old fireside—and we'll do the same. Come on, horseback rider!"

They went slowly and cautiously ahead, their Colts ready and flashlights in their left hands. The passageway narrowed considerably, but was still high and wide enough to allow them to walk abreast. It went down on the same angle for about a hundred yards, then took an abrupt slope upward. The walls and roof were of stone, underfoot it seemed to be of tiles or squares of stone set close together, the same construction as the entrance. The slope up continued for a hundred feet, opening out here and there in chambers, and then the passage became level for a few feet and suddenly opened out into a square room about twenty feet square.

All the way along the passage there were bones and pieces of copper and old time-eaten blades of swords and axes—but nothing else.

"Whoever got here," said Jimmie as they entered the chamber, "sure mopped up. See those overturned slabs, Red. That's where his——"

"Mary, Mother!" interrupted Red. "Something crawled in here and died by the smell. Devil a thing here, Jimmie. The black curse be on that Yid for—that's what smells, Jimmie, over in the corner."

Jimmie's flashlight joined Red's. "Yeah, it looks like a snow leopard—my gosh," as they walked toward the body of a magnificent leopard. "She crawled in here to die, Red. Look at the dead cubs. She brought them in or she had 'em in here, I bet. See the place she has hollowed out for a den. Look at the stones pawed to one side. Her old man must have got knocked off outside and—what are you doing?"

"Nothin'," answered Red, who had knelt close to the head of the mother leopard. "I never seen one of those babies before. Hey, Jimmie, look at them teeth? How'd you like to have them sunk into ye."

RED had drawn back a little and put one hand down on the side of the hole. No sooner had he done so than he grunted jumped up, and drew his Colt, stepping back. As he did, Jimmie promptly stepped back also, and his Colt seemed to jump in his hand.

"What is it?" he demanded throwing his light into the hole.

"I put me hand *on a man's nose!*" answered Red. "There—where I rested it!"

"*A man's nose?* Come on, goofy—come and join the Bean. Sure, you're the Czar of Russia and I'll lick anyone that——"

"I am not," said Red firmly. "And bad luck to ye, Jimmie Cordie, for even suggestin' such a thing. I put the hand of me on a man's nose, I tell ye!"

"Too bad he didn't bite you," grinned Jimmie stooping down where Red's hand had rested. "You mustn't get so damn familiar with—by gosh, Red, it *is* a nose! When your friend the leopard here kicked out in her death agony she uncovered it." As Jimmie was talking he was pawing the loose dirt from around what looked like an iron knob sticking out of the ground.

"Keep away from that damn thing," said Red. "It may be a trap or——"

"Trap? It's a statue, dumbbell. Buried, see—that's the reason the birds that beat us here didn't find it. Say? Are you a passenger on the liner? Get down here and help me clear it!"

"Get up here," commanded Red, "ye poor weak sobsister! I'll dig it out for ye!"

Jimmie got up. "Hop to it. There'll be more digging than you think, old timer. From the size of the face, that baby is nearly man size!"

Red dug with his hands, his heavy boot-toes, and his heels.

"'Tis loose," he grunted finally. "Give me a hand, Jimmie, alanna."

Together they brought the figure up out of the ground and carried it almost to the entrance of the room before setting it down. "Holy cats," Red said as they did. "It weighs enough. What the hell is it, Jimmie?"

"Darned if I know. May be a statue of Jagatai, or one he looted and thought a lot of."

They stepped back and put their lights on it.

It was an effigy of a man, short, thick set, standing erect on a low square block, with what looked like, as Red said, a towel around his waist.

Red flashed his light up on the face, "Holy smoke!" he said, "'Tis the Fighting Yid!"

"What?" asked Jimmie, who was looking at some characters carved on the stone base. "Where's the Yid?" and he turned to the entrance.

"This statue," answered Red, with deep conviction, "'Tis the livin' split of him. Take a look, Jimmie."

JIMMIE laughed and threw his light up with Red's. "Boy howdy, it is at that. Black the Yid up and he could—wait a minute. I thought the darn thing was made of iron or bronze but it might——" Jimmie reached in his pocket and brought out a pocket knife. He dug into the leg of the statue nearest to him. The knife scrapped through a layer of verdigris and then a yellow streak showed. He dug deeper, then sat down on the stone and laughed.

"What the hell now," demanded Red. "Are ye goofy, ye laughin' hyena?"

"Goofy hell!" answered Jimmie. "My gosh, it is funny, though. Here we are not able to carry ourselves out and we find a —oh, my sainted aunt Mandy!"

"Find a what?" asked Red. "If ye have gone bats now, Jimmie Cordie, I'll——"

"Oh, for Pete's sake, you nitwit. What do you think that thing is made of?"

"I dunno, what?"

"Gold my boy, gold—and we can't pack an——"

"Who can't?" interrupted Red. "Gold, is it? Sure I'll carry it meself, ye poor feeble peanut. How much do it be worth, Jimmie darlin'?"

"What? What good will it do you to know. Man, you got to pack ammunition and water, not gold."

"I'll pack 'em all three!" answered Red firmly. "How much gold is there, Jimmie?"

"Well," grinned Cordie, "given that the Yid weighs around one ninety and this baby is a little thinner, we'll say one seventy-five for him. He certainly isn't solid, or we wouldn't be able to lift him. Must be a thick

shell of gold. Gold is worth around say twenty dollars an ounce at the mint—and let me call your attention to the fact, my fair red-headed nitwit, that you are one hell of a long way from any mint at the moment. Well, at twelve ounces to the pound that's two hundred and forty dollars a pound. Two hundred and forty times one seventy-five—holy smackers. I'd need a sheet of paper and six pencils. It's somewhere around forty thousand dollars, Red."

"Is that all? Sure wan vase we——"

"Let's go back. We couldn't take it, Red, if it were worth forty million. I'd swap ten of them right now for some of the old gang with machine guns. Gold is good in some places, boy, but right here it isn't worth a tinker's damn."

They went back, and after Jimmie had told about the statue, the Boston Bean asked, "Did you say it looked like our distinguished friend here on my right?"

"It did," answered Red. "Could be himself!"

"And there was some inscription carved on the stone?"

"Yes," said Jimmie. "What's on your mind, Codfish?"

"Why, it may be that—could you get it up here where——"

"Sure, Red, go down and bring it up for the gentleman."

"Who, me—by meself? I will not. Lemme have three of the Chinks—an I will!"

The three unwounded Taiping went with him but only after Wang Li agreed to accompany them. They hadn't lost anything down that dark slope underground and they didn't like tombs anyway.

Chapter VI

"If they get to you, Yid——"

WHEN the statue was finally brought up and placed a little back from the entrance of the tomb, so that the light of day could play on it, the resemblance to the Fighting Yid was remarkable, as far as the face and general outlines of the body went. He came over and looked at it. "Oi, Popper! How come you here vid only a napkin on? If dot ain't a statue of my old man, I eat it!"

"What's the inscription, Yid?" asked the Bean.

"Vat? How the hell do I know? Vait a minute—it's Hebrew, ain't it? It is—vat de—und me de son of a rabbi, mit a million lickin's behind for not learning it—vaite; it is, *This—is*—now, vot de hell is dot damn curlycue—*a*—dot's it—*a* Und dem comes it—*F*—und dat baby is *G*, und dat baby is *H*—now I get it back—*'A-F-G-H-A-N-A'* it reads. *'This is Afghana'* and under it reads—*'The son of Jeremiah,'* who was de son of Saul, de King. How's dot for reading, mistares?"

"Very good," answered the Bean gravely. "Darn good. This is Afghana, the son of Jeremiah, who was the son of Saul the King. Fair enough, my brave Hebrew scholar—fair enough. Now we will go home, in state."

"Goofy again," said Red, moving over alongside the Bean. "Be easy now, Beany, darlin, or I'll floor ye wid a right swing to the jaw."

"Lay off, Red," warned Jimmie. "You're the goofy one. Go ahead, Codfish—tell us!"

"Let's go out where we can sit in the sun," answered the Bean.

"I've got a toehold on an idea. Now," he went on after they were all seated about a yard outside the entrance, Putney as well as the rest, "here it is—that's a statue of Afghana, from whom the Afghans claim descent. How the hell it got in there, I don't know—and I don't care. But here it is for a guess. Jagatai did a lot of promiscuous looting and he didn't care where or when. He ran across that statue in some temple or shrine or whatever the hell the Afghans call their dumps—and he promptly assimilated it. Why, he only knows, and he isn't around to tell us. Not a doubt in the world that the Afghans have some tradition about it—and that it has been handed down

that Jagatai had it. Now, question is—how much do they think of it—and would they recognize that old gent?"

"Good way to find out will be to set him out in front here and see what happens. It's a pipe they won't stay away from us very long," said Jimmie. "In fact, gents, if you will notice, it's getting time for the party. Cast your eyes over on the top of the next hill and down in the valley, and you'll see the guests beginning to arrive!"

The hill they were on was more or less a detached one from the spur that jutted out from the disconnected, broken-up range, going into the next higher one with a ridge not more than a hundred feet high. It stood out like the point of a broad bladed spear. Attack could come from any direction, down the hill as well as up and in the sides, but to reach the entrance it must be delivered squarely in front.

"If we do set the old boy out," said Grigsby, "and they recognize him, it will start something off and we're not in shape to take advantage of it. Any hard play and Putt and the Yid go south. The Bean's head is an unknown quantity. They won't make any attack yet, knowing damn well they've got to pull us out of this hole."

"That's right, George," agreed Jimmie Cordie. "They'll try us out to see what we've got, then they'll sit down in front and try and starve us out. Those gents have nothing to spend but their time. Go ahead, Codfish."

"Well, here's what I thought—if we could show them we——"

"Show who?" demanded Red. "Them chimpanzees? 'Tis all mixed up they are. What wan knows the rest——"

"How did you happen to think of starting wah-wahing?" interrupted Putney. "Put a jaw tackle on. They'll be starting up here any minte."

"Do I have to ask the likes of you——" began Red, hostly.

"Send him a letter about it," interrupted Grigsby. "Pipe down, Red. Go on, Bean."

"I'VE been told to do that several times," sighed the Bean, "and have tried without much success. Well, here it is—if the Afghans recognize the statue, they'll want it. They are the best fighters and can mop up on the rest. I thought we could show the darn thing—hole up, fight 'em off until they get sick of it—then make a deal with them to escort us back to safety in return for the statue.

"Boy," said Jimmie gravely, "the old bean is hitting on five of the six once more. But, Lord Boston, you've slipped on one or two little details. The first one is, you can't make these birds sick of fighting. They'll carry the fight to us, free, gratis, and for nothing. Second, if they see the statue it will only be like adding a little T N T to a charge of 60 per cent. gelatin powder—we won't notice the difference, old-timer. We may make 'em pause long enough to listen to a compromise, but any dicker you make with Afghans, my learned friend from Bosting, is nix with them at the first chance. Of all people, they are the last to make an agreement with—unless you have the whip hand."

"If we put it out for a minute—or long enough to give them a chance to take a good look, then stand them off, all that are here of them, what happens?" asked Putney.

"Easy," answered Cordie. "They go home or to wherever there are more of them, leaving enough here to keep us holed up, then come back with a crowd and mop up, if it take until Christmas."

"Which gives us the time we are looking for," went on Putney. "Then when they get back with enough Afghans to mop up and take care of the rest of the mixture, we can put the statue out again, only this time it will be the Yid blacked up—the darn thing is almost black and——"

"Vat?" yelled the Yid. "Oi, Putt! Vat did I ever did to you? Me, mit a towel on, outside und mit dem——"

"I'll cover you, Yid," grinned Jimmie.

"There won't any more than four or five reach you."

"I got it!" shouted the Bean. "The Yid can come to life, wave them back and—and—we can hold the Yid as prisoner and make them keep away from us—no, we'll ——"

"Inside!" Red bowled, jumping to his feet. "Here they come!"

It wasn't much of an attack, really it was more of a feeling out. A party of fifty or sixty men trotted up to the bottom of the hill, dismounted, and scattering out, rushed the slope. If it were a feeling out, it succeeded in doing that thing. It fully demonstrated to the onlookers that the men left alive and holed up were able to put up a fight. The .30-.30's stopped most of them, the rest were met by Wang Li, Red, and the Taiping and wiped out. Several of the wounded, those who had been shot down first, rolled back down the slope, and one or two got on their horses and rode back the way they had come.

"Let 'em go!" shouted Jimmie Cordie, as the Yid stepped out, his deadly rifle already at his shoulder. "You damn fool, come on, set His Joblots out—Come on, Red, you big moose, take hold!"

THE statue was set out about three feet from the entrance and the men slipped back to cover. Two of the scouting party were Afghans and had been wounded as the rush started. They were facing the other way when the statue was brought out, both of them half-sitting, half-lying on the ground. One of them staggered to his feet, turning as he did so. He saw the statue, let out a wild screech of terror, fell forward on his face. The other, from where he sat, turned at the yell and saw what the first had yelled about. He had been shot through the chest and a bloody froth was on his lips, but he jumped to his feet, raised his hands high above his head, took two full steps forward, then crumpled to the ground, dead.

"There is no doubt," said the Bean softly, "but what they recognize it."

"And there is also no doubt, John Cabot," answered Jimmie Cordie, "that news has reached the rest of our playmates. Look at 'em come—all Afghans this time. Help me get this gun out here, Red. Leave the damn think where it is—no time to bring it in. This is the one we've got to stop!"

They stopped the rush but all the machine gun ammunition was exhausted before the Afghans drew off, those that were left. The sight of the statue made them literally stark crazy. There was no drawing off of whole men, only those who were wounded so badly they could not use their weapons. The fire this time from other hills was not so bad as the range was longer and those in the charge had trusted to swords. Jimmie Cordie, as he shot the last burst, got a lead slug through the right forearm. Fortunately, however, it did not touch the bone.

"Velcome to the hospital," said the Yid, after they had taken the statue inside. "Now if Red gets a nice little von, ve all got it, ain't it?"

"Well, ye Yid ape," said Red bitterly. "I've got a good mind to take you apart."

"Get one more mind," said Grigsby, from where he was fixing Jimmie's arm, "and get to the front. They may be coming over the hill."

"They are not," answered Red, as he stepped to the entrance. "Holy cats—there go all the different kinds of wildmen—come and see, Jimmie. Look—all divided out. See—there goes them damn hyenas that the Yid belongs to!"

"Not all," corrected the Bean. "See that bunch over there and that one on the top of that hill? They're making camp, boy. We're going to be policed until the rest of the gang get here."

"Ain't that somepin'?" demanded Red. "Them few hold us! Come on, the rest of ye, sure we can dance through that many."

"Hold 'er, Red," Cordie answered. "They wouldn't fight us—they'd tail along and run

the rest up to us. We're better off here. They'd get us before we'd gone a day's march. The plan—holy mackinaw! What are you trying to do, twist the arm off me, you big cheese?"

"Stand still, Mr. Cordie," answered Grigsby with a grin. "Full many a time you've worked on me. Don't begrudge me a chance at you."

"When you get through, hand him over to me," said Putney.

"Oi, und den to me," put in the Yid. "Vat I vouldn't do to dot monkey. He poured de iodine, a quart at de time——"

THE day went by, then the next day and night. They could see camp fires on the hills now, when darkness came. There was a ring of them, some far out on the desert.

"Ridin' herd on us," said Putney, one night, as he relieved Red, who had been on guard. His wounds were healing fast, aided by the beef cubes and jerked beef, and thick broths made for the wounded by Jimmie Cordie. The Yid's wounds were better, and Grigsby's head had almost healed. The Bean was normal once more and Jimmie's arm, though painful was not serious. Of the Taiping wounded, eight were practically well, the other two were in a bad way. They were all a clean living, hard muscled bunch, who had never abused themselves and had lived in the open air, on good plain food. The dry air and the prompt first aid had prevented blood-poisoning.

Another day and night went by, then at the break of dawn on the fourth day, they saw filing down through the passes and around the hills onto the desert, an orderly array of riders—all Afghans. The men on the hills and further out came down to meet them.

"Curtain, first act!" Jimmie Cordie said, as they stood in the entrance, watching them. "Now's the time for the Yid to strut his stuff, while it's still a little dusk. Get ready Yid. Red, get the stone upon the skids and——"

"'Tis ready long ago," interrupted Red. "Strip, Abie darlin', and let daddy black ye up wid the burnt wood."

"Oi," protested the Yid. "Vait, I esk you. It's cold und I must sit dare mit nodding but a towel on."

"You sit, you polecat," warned Jimmie. "You stand—and no matter what happens, don't you move an eyelash, you hear me?"

"Do I hear you?" groaned the Yid. "I do, plenty. Vat if dey reach me, Jimmie?"

"If they reach you, old kid," grinned Cordie, "from what I see of those big knives you won't have to worry much longer than a minute about it. Remember now, Yid, don't get so carried away with your part that you forget your cue. When George and Red come out, you wait till they get on each side of you, then you reach out a hand and put it on their heads——"

"One hand on each head," interrupted the Bean firmly. "Go on, Mr. Cordie and be a little more explicit, please."

"Then," Jimmie went on, not paying any attention to the Bean, "you step down, put one arm around each of their shoulders—how's that, you hair-splitting piece of brown bread!—and walk back to the hole and in, with them."

"Und if dey gets to me first, de deal is off, ain't it?" asked the Yid, with a grin as he started back with Red and the Bean.

"If they get to you, Yid," confirmed Jimmie gravely, "the deal is off—several ways."

The Afghans seemed to be holding some kind of a conference among the chiefs, the rest standing or sitting on their horses quite a little ways back. And not until Red, Wang Li and three Taiping set the Yid, now an almost perfect duplicate of the statue of Afghana, standing on the block of stone, just outside the entrance and about in the middle did the conference break up.

"If you see it's a real come-and-get-it," instructed Jimmie Cordie to Red and Wang Li, "get your men and go out and bring it in. But——"

THE Afghans had seen it and there was a surge forward which was checked by shouted orders. Then a party of twenty or more mounted their horses and trotted briskly for the hill. There was no attempt at a charge and the riders were old men, most of them. "We got a nibble," said Jimmie from the Colt machine gun, "let 'em have all the line they want."

"Who's going to talk to them?" asked Putney.

"I think that most Afghans speak Pushtu," answered the Bean, "and the educated ones speak Persian. I can speak a little Pushtu and—better halt 'em, Jimmie!"

"I'll do that little thing," answered Cordie, and the machine gun began to rap out the warning. A line of sand spurted up about a hundred feet ahead of the riders. It ran from the extreme left to the right and was laid down as if by a ruler. There was not a foot of over or under shooting along the whole line. It told the Afghans to stop before it and they knew it did and stopped well on the far side. From where they were they could see the statue plainly and several were out of their saddles, kneeling on the sand. Three of the older men rode up to the imaginary line, dismounted and stood, their right hands held up, palm forward, the universal sign all over the world of peaceful intentions.

"Get out, Bean," commanded Grigsby. "You with him, Wang Li. You say you know Persian, they may speak it. When you get halfway down, wave them up to you."

The three Afghans advanced without hesitation to where the Bean and Wang Li halted. The rest of their party dismounted and joined those kneeling in the sand.

"What do you wish, you men who are our enemies?" asked the Bean, speaking Pushtu.

The oldest man spoke readily in the same language. "All men are our enemies who come unbidden into our lands. We come for our ancestor, Afghana, who has been hidden from us many years."

"This is not your land," answered the Bean. "Your land lies to the south and east. Your ancestor came to us of his own free will—and will stay with us, until we go back to our land."

The grim old Afghan laughed. "We will come and get him," he answered. "And you dogs, sons of dirt eating mothers, will die—slowly!"

The Bean laughed. "Before that happens, oh father of many dogs, Afghana will be lost to you forever. We will burn him up and send his spirit back to hell. But first, oh blind fools of the north, see for yourselves, that he will fight with us!"

The Bean took off his sun helmet and reached for his neck cloth, as if to wipe his face. As he did, Grigsby and Red Dolan came out and stood, one on each side of the Yid, who slowly raised his hands and put one on each head, according to instructions. The three Afghans gasped with astonishment and those on the sand, stood up. Then, the Yid got stately down from the stone and Red came around to the other side. The Yid reached up, he had to, to get to the shoulders of the two big men, and put one arm around each of them, as far as he could. They walked slowly up to the entrance and went in, disappearing in the semi-darkness.

"Afghana is our brother," said the Bean, "and will go with us. Tonight we take him through the ground to a new resting place. If you think you can get him to go with you, unless he wishes, oh robbers of widows and orphans, come and try it—and never see him again!"

The three old men, all of them Ghazi, men who devoted their lives to the extermination of all other creeds but Mohammedan, stood, their eyes and mouths wide open.

"Go back to the slaves' quarters," went on the Bean. "Or come—and be smitten with his wrath."

"Lord," said the old man who had spoken. "Do not go with the most holy one until we have made report. Upon what terms, Lord, will he come to us, his children?"

The Bean was too clever to fall into the trap. If he had announced terms, the Afghans would have become suspicious and would have begun to figure coldly. "How do I know?" he demanded. "Am I to speak for a Lord such as he? Get back to your kennels and it may be that at dawn tomorrow, he may speak. If before, we will signal you."

The three old men turned without a word and walked down the hill and the party rode back to where the thousand-odd warriors waited for them.

"WELL," said the Bean, after he had told the rest what had happened, "what now?"

"This," said Jimmie Cordie. "It's a pipe they'll fuss about it all today and tonight, then in the morning we'll bring out the real thing and signal them to come back to where they were just now. Then, Beany, you tell them that Afghana has spoken. He is to go with us, his friends, until we reach the border of Bokhara. His children are to follow and guard on all sides—but far away, beyond range of a gun——"

"Wait, dumb-bell," said Putney. "How the hell does Afghana know what the range of a gun is—also how does he know what a gun is?"

"Well, you world's biggest fool—do you suppose the Afghans will figure that? If they could, they wouldn't believe a statue could come to life. Nut, they think it perfectly natural that he knows everything. To continue—tell them he says that if they close in, or allow any other race or breed to come between them and him, that he will at once go back to his underground home or Paradise, whichever sounds best. When he is ready for them to come and get him, he will appear alone."

"I am forced to ask you some questions, Mr. Cordie," said Grigsby gravely.

"Go ahead," answered Jimmie generously. "We've got all day."

"The first one is—do you think the Afghans, once we are in the clear, will obey that rule of out of range, or will they come galumping in and take their great grandpa away from us?"

"Ain't that somepin?" said Red. "How about that, Jimmie darlin'."

"The answer to that is, God he knows, and no one else!" said Jimmie with a grin. "Personally I believe they will do exactly as they think he wants them to do. If it were us alone, they'd agree to anything and then scrag us, but with him—I doubt it. Their holy men wouldn't stand for it, taking the chance of losing him."

"Well, at that, we can't stay here. The second question is, Mr. Cordie, when we get to the said border, just what do you expect to find? A traffic cop on the corner to shoo them back? What is to prevent them from getting their relation and then hopping merrily on us? What's the difference in being killed here and killed there?"

"Not a darn thing," agreed Jimmie. "What I thought was, the last night out, we'd set the old bird up on top of the trench, soon as it gets dark and take it on the lam, having told them not to show close until they saw him alone. By morning we ought to be far on our way. None of them will want to leave. His Royal Joblots and chase us much further."

"You mention trenches—is it your idea that we dig in?"

"Yeah boy, every night—some of the Afghans might get a little ambitious to take a good close look at him and come sneaking up. Those babies can crawl up to a cobra and get first bite before she knows anything about it."

"I see. Now, one more question and I'm done. Does the Yid do his famous impersonation on the march?"

"He do," answered Jimmie, with a grin.

"Vat?" said the Yid. "I go out mit a towel und all blacked mit burnt vood? In de sun I sveat und it rolls off me. Und mit bare feet? Oi, Jimmie, such a business!"

"Don't holler before you're hurt," answered Jimmie. "You're carried in an elegant hammock, Yid, with bearer and a fan and everything."

"What?" shouted Red. "And who the hell is going to carry that fat omadhaun for three days?"

"You, for one," answered Jimmie.

"I am? Like hell I am, Jimmie Cordie. Take shame for yeself, ye——"

"All right, delicate—then I'll take your place. If four men can't pack a hundred and eighty-five pounds of live weight, taking it easy, for four days, they better go to the old man's home—where I'll send you, you red-headed ape, just as soon as we get home. I'll do your packing for you and carry your gun also!"

"Sure now, Jimmie, darlin'," soothed Red. "Ye know I was only foolin'. Sure I'll pack Abie, all by meself if ye say so."

"Yeah? Well, just for that you can be one of the other four that pack our new buddy along—that will be heavier."

"For Pete's sake, Jimmie," said Putney, "what do you want to pack that damn thing along for?"

"Why—to leave for them—but at that, it isn't necessary—we can leave the Yid just as well."

"Vat? For dem? You leave me? Not vile I got it a pair of legs—vounded or oddervize. Jimmie! Ain't it you und me is buddies? Black up the Irisher und leave him—he likes dem und goes on visits mit dem."

"Never mind now, Red," said Grigsby as Red started to say something. "Go on, Jimmie, make it plain."

"All right—the Yid is carried in state, sitting in a hammock—is that plain? Then, we cover up His Joblots, without the base, with whatever we have got—we may have to make a long box out of ammunition cases—and we pack him also. There are eight of the Taiping that can lend a hand plus the three whole ones, and Wang Li, Red, the Bean, you and I in commission to do a little packing. We'll strip down to our rifles and gats and four days' chuck and water. We'll have to leave the Colt machine, which I'll put out of service. Now, on the line of march they can see the Yid being carried. If they start in he can wave them back and——"

"If they keep right on coming, Jeems?" grinned Grigsby.

"Then, gentlemen," answered Cordie firmly. "We will be forced to first scrag the Yid, then fight it out."

"Try und do it," protested the Yid. "If my children don't obey popper's orders, I gets it a rifle und joins in."

"Then," went on Jommie, "if they do leave us alone, the last night out, we will stick the real Mr. Afghana up on top of the trench and execute a masterly retreat to the rear, as fast and as far as we can."

"What," said Red, "and him all gold? Leave him for them scuts!"

"Boy, you'll be lucky to get out of this man's country with your skin, let alone a shirt tail," answered Jimmie.

THE rest of the day they sat at the entrance and watched the Afghans. There seemed to be several conferences going on at the same time and twice fights swirled up, to be scattered out by the rest. In the morning, at break of day, the three old men came up once more. The Yid, arrayed as Afghana, came to the entrance and stood with one arm around Grigsby, as the Bean and Wang Li went down to meet them. The bandage on his left leg had been pulled tight and smooth, and he looked the part even better than the day before. The Afghans looked a little closer also, but what they saw only confirmed their belief. The Afghans have distinctly Jewish features and without doubt their descent is from a Hebrew origin.

After the Bean had given them Afghana's message, adding to it just what the white men would do at the first sign of a rush, among which was that they would cut Afghana up in little pieces and eat him. the three swore by the Prophet that Afghana would be obeyed in every particular. And to prove it, after they got back to the main body, the Afghans spread out, in an ever widening circle, until there was a mile on either side—and nothing in between.

Jimmie Cordie led, then came Wang Li, then the Bean, then four of the Taiping carrying the Yid, who lolled back in the hammock made from discarded coats and web belts, and hung between interlocking gun barrels. Then four more of the Taiping carrying what looked like a pile of ammunition boxes and food carriers on a platform made of empty boxes. Back of them came Grigsby, Putney, and the two Taiping that were still too weak to do any more than steady work pack their rifles and belts, but ready to spell any of the others. Alongside of the Yid stalked Red Dolan, waving a fan, made of several shirts, very solicitous of the Yid's comfort.

The first night out they dug a shallow trench, running at right angles, then back on a half curve. There was no attack or attempt at one. They could see the fires of the Afghans, way out in the desert, all around them. The second day and night passed, but no Afghan came within a half mile. The third day went by and now they could see the range from which they had come down in the desert.

They had refused horses offered, because of the carrying of the statue, the Bean stating that Afghana had rather be carried.

At halts the Yid would get down from the hammock and sit on a box or walk around, always inside the little circle formed around him. "Let them take a look-see," Jimmie said. "But not too close a one."

When they made camp that night Jimmie said, "Go out about two hundred yards, Bean, and wave in the old birds. Tell them that the time has come for Afghana to go back with them. That in the morning they are to come for him when they see him standing alone. That he commands that they no longer circle his friends and that they are to withdraw two miles in the rear. Say that Jeremiah, his father, comes tonight to take his friends further on their journey and that it won't be at all healthy for any of them to see the old man—chief it up better than that, but that's the idea. As soon as it gets good and dark, we'll stick the old boy up, the Yid can cover his slim, beautiful form with a few clothes, and we will do the snake wiggle for the hills."

"And right then," said Putney, "we will find out just how far we have pulled the cork of our boy friends!"

Chapter VII

"The—his hand turned!"

THE Bean got back with the statement that Afghana would be obeyed to the word and after it became fairly dark they brought the statue out and as they got ready to set it up on the shallow trench top, Jimmie said, "For once in my life I can state truthfully that gold does not look near as good as it generally does to old man Cordie's son Jimmie. We've been in some tight—what the hell is the matter with you, you bean pole?" Jimmie finished, as the Bean staggered back against him. The Bean and the Yid had been fooling around the statue.

"His—*the hand turned!*" the Bean ejaculated. "It turned! Anyone would jump back. I took hold of it and—look! Something is sliding out!"

The hand of the statue had turned as the Bean said. He must have touched a hidden spring. It had turned and fallen back, hanging on a hinge from the forearm which was on a downward slant. For some little way up, the forearm must have been hollow, because as the Bean spoke a short, fat little roll slid down the arm and dropped to the ground almost at the feet of the Yid.

"A package wrapped mit gold!" he gasped, and picked it up. It was not more than six inches long and about four inches through at the thickest part. The gold of the thin plates that made the tight wrapping was not tarnished in any way and glistened in the light from the little "Indian fire" like a golden spider in the sun.

"Vat de hell can it be?" demanded the Yid holding it out at arm's length. "Maybeso it is poison, vat?"

"Open it up, Yid," suggested Jimmie. "If it's poison, only you will get it."

THE Yid produced a sturdy pocket knife and began to charily pry open the bent over corners. "Writin' mit it," he said, as one came up. "Same as before, Hebrew—Vat de—oi, smell dat? Frankincense and myrhh—und—vat de hell is dot—aloes—calamus—camphor—my, vat a lofly ——"

"All right, Yid," interrupted Jimmie. "Come back to earth. We haven't got such a heck of a lot of time, you know. We all know what the old timers used to make mummies with. Open her up!"

"Hold it," said Grigsby. "Read what's on the gold sheet first, Yid."

"Who me? In dis light? Vell, maybeso I can if one of you hold it a flash down low so de Afghans don't see it und vonder vot is doin'."

The Bean squatted down beside him and held his light.

"Vell, it says—*I am*——" and the Yid hastily put the package down. "You hold it, Jimmie."

"Are you wishing something on me?" demanded Jimmie, as he picked it up.

"No, but me, I don't—vell, it says—*I am de son of Jenghiz Khan—who is*—hold de light closer, Beaneater. It is hard for me to make it out—vait till I remember. Oi, now I am glad dat so many times you took it the slipper to me, popper—now I got it vonce more, wait till I can say it proper mit de right words——

"I am Jagatai, the son of Jenghis Khan, Lord of the World, Leader of the Hordes. My name is Jagatai. I conquered the Kanklais—destroyed Otrar—Lahore—Herat. I, like my father, am the scourge of God. This is my heart—my fighting, pitiless heart that knew not fear. Read and obey—on my death which is soon, my heart is to be taken from my body and hidden in the forearm of the image of Afghana that I took from the hills and kept with me always. He was a fighting man, and his children's children are fighting men. None better could guard the heart of Jagatai. This—that my heart will remain in the hills that I love and my spirit will come here to be near it—this I have ordered as I lie in Samarkand on my deathbed. Woe be unto him that disobeys. I am Jagatai!"

The Yid finished and looked up. The eyes of them all were on the package held in Jimmie Cordie's hand.

"My God," said Jimmie softly. "The fighting heart of Jagatai Khan!"

"Und vorth," said the Yid, once more back to his usual manner of speech, "all de money in de Metropolitan Museum or de London——"

"Is it now, Yid?" demanded Red. "Well, any wan of us can carry that."

"Sit down, you birds," said Grigsby. "Wrap that sheet around it again, Jimmie. Listen—it is probably just what the Yid said. Any museum in the world would pay thousands for it. But—did you get it—*'this—that my heart—will remain in the place I love.'* Do any one of you birds want to see the heart of a fighting man like Jagatai, who fought at the head of his hordes down through all the world that he knew, opened up in some damn museum and pawed over and looked at by men that would call a copper if a cripple threatened them? I say to put it back and turn the hand again—and let his heart stay where he wanted it. I don't often sound off about things, but I am sure doing it this time. We're fighting men—he was a fighting man—what the hell is money to us—we've all got plenty of it. I——"

"And even if we didn't have," interrupted Jimmie Cordie, "what difference would that make. Picture us going along, knowing that we sold the heart of Jagatai Khan. By gosh—let's admit that we got licked, for once—licked good and proper, and if it hadn't been for a damn lucky break we would all be pushing up whatever kind of flowers they've got in this man's country!"

"That's right, Jimmie," said Red firmly. "I know what ye mean, ye scut. Sure it would be like—like—wan of us sellin' out

the rest. Put the damn thing back, Jimmie."

"What's all the blub-blub about anyway," asked Putney. "We better be on our way if we are going, instead of holding a sewing circle chat. George is right—even if he did put it as clear as mud. And so is Jimmie. We got our heads in the lion's jaw and if it hadn't been for Jagatai using that statue for his heart and having it buried under the floor, we would have gotten our heads bitten off. Put it back where it belongs and lets go!"

"How about you, Bean?" asked Jimmie. "You see the point, don't you?"

"Certainly," answered the Bean gravely, "several of them. Whoever is sat——"

"Vell," interrupted the Yid with a grin. "I don't—but vat is jake mit de rest, is jake mit me, always, ain't it, Jimmie?"

"Yeah, boy," answered Jimmie Cordie with a smile that told how much he really thought of the Yid, "All the time, Abie, old kid!"

"Put it back, Jimmie," said Grigsby. And the five hard-bitten soldiers of fortune watched him gently place the heart of Jagatai, once more wrapped in the golden plates, far up in the forearm of Afghana, and twist the hand back in place. After he had finished he turned with a grin. "Get His Royal Joblots up on the top side, and pray to Heaven there'll be no moon!"

"No will be," announced Wang Li, who had gravely watched and listened. "Much dark, very soon."

HIS prophecy was correct the darkness fell suddenly like a black blanket over the desert.

"All right," Grigsby announced finally. "Let's go. Four pointed star, wounded in the middle—take the point, Red. Jimmie, take the rear. We'll darn soon find out about the cork-pulling stuff."

If the meeting of no Afghans or anyone else was proof, they had pulled the cork. When dawn came they were in the second range of hills beyond any pursuit, which did not come. They marched steadily on toward where Jimmie's friend was waiting for them.

The Fighting Yid stopped suddenly, an expression of deepest concern came over his still more or less blackened face, and he began to hunt frantically through all his pockets.

"What's the matter with you, you Yid ape?" demanded Jimmie Cordie, sitting down on a convenient rock, the rest following his example. The Yid paid no attention to them at first, then, "Oi, such a business! I know dat ven I strip in de hole to be—I put it oudt to remember it—und forgot it. Maybe I von't catch——"

"You forgot what?" demanded Red.

"My handkerchief," moaned the Yid, "und——"

"Holy cats," said Jimmie, beginning to laugh as they all did but the Yid, and Wang Li, who was regarding the Yid with astonishment.

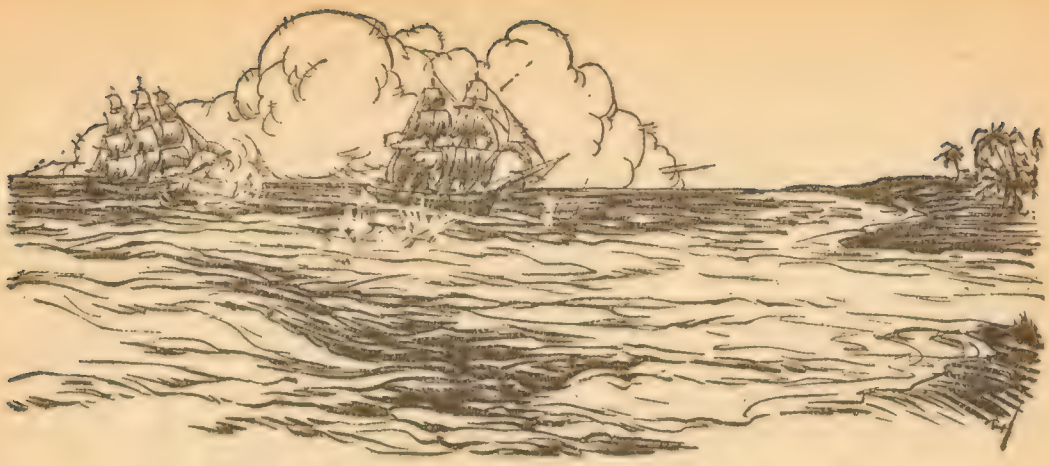
"Your handkerchief," repeated Jimmie as soon as he could stop laughing. "Well, Abie, you have my royal permission to run back and get it. We'll wait for you."

"Better I should do it," answered the Yid still mournfully, "than catch the hell I will from my girl, ain't it? She gave it to me mit my initials on it und everything. Now she will think I giv it to some odder girl und——"

"What?" interrupted Red sternly. "Ye get in where the skin of ye ain't worth a bad cent—yet get out of it—ye have held the heart of a fighting lad in the hand of ye—on top of that, ye have been carried like a king for days, wid me fannin' ye—an now ye stand raisin' hell about a nose-wiper! Double shame on ye for a——"

"Vot is all dot to vat I get ven I get back to Hong Kong from my girl?" demanded the Yid hotly. "You don't know my girl, Mister Viseguy Redhead!"

"The Yid's right," said Jimmie Cordie. "I wasn't quite sure before, but now I am. He's got the relative importance of things sized up correctly. *Allons, mes enfants!*"



SNARING THE SEA FOX

By JAMES K. WATERMAN

Author of "The Sea Fox Claws to Windward," "The Return of the Sea Fox"

The French thought they had him—this Sea Fox—this little Yankee adventurer. And indeed it looked as though he had at last been run to earth. For not a gunshot off his Wild Pigeon's *quarter the French frigate* Araignee *thundered down the wind—and ahead lay the dread reef called "Dutchman's Grave"!*

THAT thick, clammy mist peculiar to the Gulf of Guinea, which had enshrouded the French frigate *Araignee* during the night suddenly lifted about eight in the morning, disclosing on her starboard bow a large brigantine, well within gunshot, and heading into the coast under an immense press of canvas.

"A slaver bound into Old Calabar!" exclaimed Commodore Murat, a tall, stiff man with bushy black side-whiskers and eyes cold and gray as polished stone.

Focussing his glasses on the strange vessel he took a long look, swore softly beneath his breath, and turned again to his first lieutenant, who was new to the West African Coast.

"Mon Dieu! Mr. Lassan, that is the Yankee contraband-runner and slaver, the *Wild Pigeon,* the fastest keel on this coast—commanded by Captain Pepper—the Sea Fox, y' know—the most notorious smuggler in the trade and a man who is acknowledged to have no rival in the way of daring and success."

The commodore's agitation increased with his speech and he almost shouted, "Beat to quarters, Mr. Lassan, and give her a shot as soon as you can. The Sea Fox will doubtless engage us, for there is no surrender about him. He'll show fight, I'm sure!"

A hum of excitement ran through the thirty-two gun frigate as the men ran to quarters, for here was indeed a quarry worthy of any ship's metal. In another half-minute the frigate yawned slightly, a sheet of red flame issued from her starboard bowchaser followed by the sullen boom of a twenty-four pounder and a shot kicked up the spray close alongside of the *Wild Pigeon's* port quarter.

But contrary to the commodore's expectations, the Sea Fox made no hostile movement; holding his ship steadily on her course, her long, black, exquisitely proportioned hull cleaving the blue sea with all the grace and speed of a dolphin.

"*Mon Dieu!* He thinks he can escape from under my guns!" muttered the commodore, striding excitedly up and down the quarterdeck. "And he will, too," he added to himself, "if I keep off to bring my broadside to bear. I'll have to depend on my bow-chasers to wing him."

For a few minutes the black brigantine gradually increased her lead over the frigate, and the foaming bar of the Calabar River could be seen plainly about two miles ahead, when, of a sudden, the wind dropped to a faint zephyr. The slaver had run into a nearly calm streak. And while they were fanning across this the *Araignee,* which still held the wind, was overhauling them hand over hand and already her shots were spraying the water all about the contraband-vessel. But as yet no shot had struck her and this fact awakened a suspicion in the mind of the commodore. It suddenly dawned upon him that possibly the Sea Fox had sympathizers aboard the frigate. Then he remembered that among his crew were some men of the wrecked French brig *L'Aigle* whom the Sea Fox, at imminent risk of being captured meanwhile, had rescued and taken into Ayudah, nine months ago.

"Mr. Lassan," ordered the commodore dryly, "have the men serving the guns relieved and see if the firing is not more accurate!"

It seemed to be, but just as a shot tore through the second reef-band of the smuggler's mains'l she got the wind again, a sweet, strong breeze from the eastward. But it came too late. The frigate was now too close for the Sea Fox to hope to escape by depending on the speed of his craft alone. Realizing this, the *Wild Pigeon's* foremost hands—thirty seasoned ocean-scamps—looked inquiringly aft at their famous leader.

The Sea Fox regarded them with his curiously unflinching black eye—he had but one—and waved his hand in a reassuring gesture, his rugged, powerful features lighted by a smile. In the midst of this danger, imminent and threatening, which would have broken the spirit of a less resolute man he seemed actually happy.

Turning his short, thickset figure to windward the Sea Fox took a squint at the *Araignee* soaring down, her grinning guns run out, and gave a rapid order to Tom Dollar, the long, lanky mate, who immediately left the poop, a wide grin on his leathern countenance.

PULSES leaping with the fever of the chase so that he could hardly hold the glasses to his eyes, Commodore Murat saw the *Wild Pigeon,* of a sudden, yaw wildly and then come staggering up into the wind, while her sheets and braces were let fly. The next instant her crew began running along the decks, dragging long poles which they flung over the side and began pushing on frantically.

"Hurrah, hurrah, Mr. Lassan!" exploded the commodore in a very frenzy of delight. "The clever Sea Fox is caught at last! He's gone aground on 'The Dutchman's Grave,' part of the Bakasi Banks. I didn't think it ran out quite this far, though. See they are trying to shove the vessel off. Ha-ha, much good it will do them. We——" He broke off suddenly, his face blanching as he gave an apprehensive glance at his three soaring steeples of canvas and then across the long green swells to where the breakers were blossoming white as they boomed on the yellow African sands.

"*Mon Dieu!* We're not sure of the water under us either, Mr. Lassan!" he interjected hurriedly. We might go aground, too. Hard down your wheel and let her come to the wind. Back your main-yard!"

These orders were executed in a twinkling and the first lieutenant sought the commodore for further instructions.

"Man first, second, and third cutters, Mr. Lassan!" he directed, "and pull over to the slaver and take her by boarding. If the Sea Fox attempts to repel you, tell him unless he desists you will draw your boats out of the line of fire and signal the frigate to give him a broadside. But in

any case he can't escape. See how vainly his crew are trying to shove her off with the poles!"

Mr. Lassan smiled at his volatile commander, who was so delighted at cornering the great Sea Fox that he was now actually doing a little dance-step.

In three minutes the same number of boats were dropped into the water, each one full of bluejackets armed with pistol and cutlass. They had hardly gotten a cable's length away from the frigate, however, when the commodore's face underwent a frightful contortion as he saw the slavers suddenly drop their poles overboard and make a dash for the running-gear. In another minute the beautiful brigantine with every stitch of canvas set was flying like a monstrous albatross over the rippling sea for the bar, now about a mile and a half distant.

"Tricked, by God, tricked!" bellowed the commodore like a bull in pain and slammed his glasses to the deck with such violence that the lenses flew about the deck. "That damned Sea Fox wasn't aground at all—he just pretended to be so as to render us temporarily helpless!"

Commodore Murat's lips trembled so with impotent rage that it was all he could do to stutter the order to recall the boats and then fill the yards. But all this took precious time, as the Sea Fox had very nicely calculated, and before the frigate was again in pursuit the black brigantine was safely out of gunshot.

"The game is not played out yet, sir," ventured the first lieutenant. "Look at the bar! It would be next to madness for the Sea Fox to attempt it, sir!"

HOPE indeed revived in the breast of the fuming, commodore as he scanned the bar. It was one boiling mass of surf; great green billows rolling in and breaking on it and filling the air with spume. Would the Sea Fox dare to take his vessel through that maelstrom or wait until slack water when the bar could be navigated in comparative safety? If the Sea Fox decided to wait, as it appeared he must, there was a chance for the frigate to work inshore and take the brigantine by boarding.

But in another minute the commodore got an inkling of the desperate nature of the man he was endeavoring to capture. Through another pair of glasses he saw the Sea Fox being lashed to the wheel. Her crew then sprang upon the sheerpoles and clustered in the lower rigging. Not a halliard or sheet was started.

Breathlessly the men on the *Araignee* watched as the *Wild Pigeon,* her broad canvas wings stretching far out over the boiling water and towering in graceful symmetry to the blue African sky, hurled herself into the flying spume.

The Sea Fox was steering her like a thread through a needle and both skipper and ship were getting the bath of their lives. For part of the time the green, white-maned sea-horses were racing over her decks almost to the top of her bulwarks. Then the noble craft would shake herself, rise on a monstrous billow, her long polished hull shooting out of water until nearly half her keel, with the bright copper sheathing flashing in the sun, was visible. Then she would be buried again leaving nothing to be discerned but two snowy canvas spires rushing through acres of foam and the man-of-war hawks circling and dodging those sky-scraping trucks and screaming their exultation. One minute more and the *Wild Pigeon* had crossed the bar without parting so much as a ropeyarn.

An involuntary murmur of admiration came from nearly three hundred throats aboard the frigate as the *Wild Pigeon* shot into smooth water and trimmed her yards for the run up the river to Old Calabar (Duketown). She was safe now in the territory of Duke Ephraim, king of Calabar. Two hours later the *Wild Pigeon* was snugly moored in the midst of thick mangroves, close to the slave-*baracoons,* and about a quarter-mile above Duketown.

IN A black and brooding silence Commodore Murat watched the Yankee brigantine until she melted into the shadows of the high wooded banks. Then he gave orders for the frigate to haul her wind and lay off and on until the turn of the tide. After which he strode into his cabin his eyes glaring from under the frowning brows like those of a madman's.

"I'll be ruined—ruined!" he grated, slamming his gold-banded cap onto the table. "Yes, I'm done for if the Governor of San Luiz ever learns of the manner in which I've been outmaneuvered by that devilish Yankee." In a sudden fury he dashed his fist onto the polished mahogany: *"Mon Dieu!* I will become the laughingstock of the squadron. I might possibly be court-martialed! The one thing that will save me now is to capture the Sea Fox. He must leave this river in irons, my prisoner!"

Late in the afternoon the *Araignee* sailed up the river, and rounding-to in a direct line with the King of Calabar's English house, let go her anchor.

"I shall have to set a snare for that Sea Fox," the commodore confided to his first lieutenant. "Match cunning with cunning so to speak." He let his eyes rove over the town of palm-thatched huts, shaded by great tamarinds and coco-palms, until they rested on a thatched-over hulk moored to a bamboo-landing, and flying the French flag from her stub of a mizzen-mast.

"There is Trader Target's hulk over yonder," he mused. "He is a Frenchman transacting business under our flag. If the Sea Fox should set foot aboard there he would be in French territory in a manner of speaking. Hm, we shall see!"

"You mean, sir," asked the first officer, looking puzzled, "that you can't arrest the Sea Fox anywhere else but on the hulk?"

"Exactly. You see that while we are negotiating with Duke Ephraim for those Ibinku concessions, we naval commanders have orders not to molest any vessels trading in his territory unless they are known, beyond doubt, to have slaves actually aboard. And I wouldn't care to take the responsibility of arresting the Sea Fox even on the hulk but for the fact that he is an escaped convict."

"An escaped convict!" echoed Mr. Lassan. "Why how could that be, sir."

"Oh, you haven't heard. Well a little over two years ago one of the squadron found him aboard of a French slaving schooner coming down the coast and the judge at San Luiz sentenced him to ten years in the Brest prison. He served five months and then escaped in some mysterious fashion. There is still a reward of five thousand dollars for his capture!"

"That being the case," decided Mr. Lassan, "I doubt very much whether such a clever rogue will ever step foot on the hulk while we are here."

Commodore Murat shrugged his shoulders. "I doubt it myself. But I'll set my trap aboard of the hulk nevertheless. There is a bare chance the Sea Fox may step into it. He's reckless enough to do most anything." He paused and slammed his fist into the open palm of his left hand, "But I'll get him eventually. Listen, Mr. Lassan. Rear-Admiral Fusenot, the Governor of San Luiz y'know, is bound down the coast on a dispatch-boat on his way here. A Mpongwe runner reported him a little to the north of the Bonny River yesterday. That means he'll probably be here sometime on Sunday, the day after tomorrow. Well, as soon as he clinches this concession with Duke Ephraim I shall have a free hand and I'm then going to throw a boarding-party aboard the *Wild Pigeon* and take the Sea Fox prisoner at all hazards. Remember he is an escaped convict and wanted by the French Government."

THAT night the Sea Fox had two visitors. The first to arrive was the Mpongwe named Krinji, the river pilot and chief of the Egbo spies for Duke Ephraim. Besides speaking all the native dialects, he

understood English, French, and naturally Spanish, the language of the coast. That Krinji could speak French was an accomplishment the commodore little dreamed the pilot possessed and he had carried on the conversation with his first lieutenant, outlining his plans, unguardedly in the presence of the spy, who was standing at the time nearby, apparently unconcerned, gazing over the muddy river. Forthwith Krinji made the Sea Fox acquainted with the commodore's scheme and then departed hurriedly to amuse himself with the gathering in front of the evening bonfire in the square by the palaver house.

Twenty minutes later the next visitor boarded the *Wild Pigeon* and was warmly greeted by the Sea Fox and Tom Dollar. It was Trader Target from the hulk, a thin, tired-looking man with a kindly cast of countenance. He sank into a chair opposite the Sea Fox at the latter's invitation.

Clearing his throat the trader said finally, "I've come to tell you that Commodore Murat put five of his Senegalese, disguised as Kroomen, aboard my hulk not an hour ago. I suppose you know what he did that for, Captain Pepper?"

"To be sure I do," said the Sea Fox, twirling his inevitable quill toothpick. "He's setting a snare for me. Thank ye for coming over an' tellin' me."

"Why shouldn't I. I haven't forgotten the time three years ago when that fire burned me out how you lent me the money and goods to start and——"

"Oh, belay that, Target!" interjected the Sea Fox reddening. "We can live but once, d'ye see. Tell me about the commodore. Guess he's all het up over that leetle trick I showed him this mornin'." The Sea Fox chuckled reminiscently.

The trader leaned over in his chair and lowered his voice.

"Something has got into him. I don't know what it is, but he offered me thirty-five hundred dollars in gold if I would decoy you aboard my hulk so that his men could take you."

"Jumpin' Judith!" boomed the Sea Fox sitting bolt upright in his chair. "Thirty-five hundred, eh. Even at that the Commodore ain't hurtin' himself none. He'd collect five thousand dollars for my capture, d'ye see. What next?"

"Well, in my business I have to pretend to be friends with everybody, of course, but after listening to his proposition I pointed out to him that it would be useless to go to all that bother for if he did get you a prisoner aboard of the frigate, some of the crew would probably manage to let you escape."

"H-mm. An' what did he say to that, Target?"

"He said he would take good care of that. He intends placing you in one of the staterooms adjoining his own cabin where he can keep you under personal surveillance."

"He said he'd put me in one o' them staterooms did he?" asked the Sea Fox eagerly.

"Yes. He will trust no one but himself to guard you."

FOLLOWED a long pause during which the Sea Fox chewed on his toothpick and every now and then scratched his short freckled nose meditatively.

"Let's see, Target," said the Sea Fox finally. "If ye had all that gold ye could go back to the south of France an' set up that leetle wine-shop ye're allus harpin' on."

The trader sighed and threw out his thin hands deprecatingly.

"True, but I would never betray a man like you for that hulk full of gold—no, not if I was starving!"

"I know it, ole feller," agreed the Sea Fox heartily. "Now lemme think a minnit, an' sorta get the twists out o' this."

After a little he mused, "One thing sartain, folks—if the commodore did take me prisoner he'd never leave the river till the Gov'ner o' San Luiz arrived. That's p'int number one. An' it looks like he's got me

completely bottled up here. There's one o' his cutters out thar' now patrollin' the river. An' arter the Gov'nor settles his business one way or t'other the commodore intends to climb aboard here an' yank me off by the neck. A hell of a prospect I must say."

Cap'n Pepper grinned, scratched his nose and resumed.

"Now if the commodore had me in limbo aboard his frigate all this here vigilance would be relaxed, d'ye see. Tom Dollar here would be able to get the blacks aboard in readiness to sail sometime Sunday, which is the day arter tomorrow. Er, by the by, Target, you've been aboard the *Araignee* any number o' times. Could ye gimme a plan o' the commodore's cabin.

Upon the trader saying that he could, the Sea Fox had him draw the plan on a piece of paper.

"What do you intend to do with it?" asked the trader, seeing the earnestness with which the Sea Fox examined the sketch. "How can that help you, Captain?"

"This here is the key to the hull situation," explained the Sea Fox smiling a little grimly. "Now brail out yer ears an' listen, ye folks. Sunthin' gotta be did darn quick. Fust I wanta know Target, could the commodore raise that thirty-five hundred dollars at a minnit's notice?"

"Yes, he would get it from the French agent. And he said he would pay me half of the money upon my promising to get you aboard the hulk and the other half just as soon as he had you a prisoner. But why ask that?"

"'Sall I wanta know, Target. Tomorrow sometime ye go an' collect seventeen hundred and fifty dollars off'n the Commodore. Tell him that you've induced me to come aboard yer hulk that same evening to look at some tusks ye wanta sell me, d'ye see. I'll be aboard ye 'bout eight-thirty—now don't interrupt me," as the trader and Tom Dollar leaped to their feet and began a storm of protest—"thar ain't but one way outa this an' that is for the commodore to take me in charge—for a while."

AFTER supper, the next day, the Sea Fox brought a pair of marine handcuffs out of his room and had Tom Dollar snap them on his wrists. The Sea Fox then unwound a piece of fishline from the top button of his waistband. In the end of the line was a running bowline which he slipped down over the spindle of the lock in one of the cuffs and pulling back on the line with his teeth he drew the bolt. The handcuff slackened on his wrist and he slipped his hand out and went to work on the remaining iron. In less than three minutes from the time the irons were put on him the Sea Fox was free.

"Hell's lifts!" exclaimed the admiring Tom Dollar, "ye did that slick's a whistle, cap'n. But, say, s'pose they ain't got them kind o' irons on the frigate. 'Twould be hell to pay an' no pitch hot!"

"The *Araignee* uses the same kind," the skipper assured him. "Trader Target told me. But I'll take a bit of wire along in case. Now comes the principal part, Tom Dollar."

He stripped off his upper garments to the skin and then had the mate strap a short, double-barreled pistol underneath the upper part of his right arm close to the armpit in such a way that when the arm was extended, as it would be if the Sea Fox was searched for weapons, it was entirely free from contact with the body.

The Sea Fox put on his clothes and looked at his watch.

"Eight o'clock, Tom Dollar. Time I was goin'."

They went on deck and Robin Hood, the Negro bosun, brought the dinghy to the gangway.

"You know what to do, Tom Dollar," said the Sea Fox, "whether I weather this thing or not. An' if I don't come back at the time specified, jes' give my regards to the boys in the Astor House bar an' buy 'em a drink for me."

Drawing a deep breath he shook hands with Tom Dollar, gave a long look alow and

aloft at his beloved vessel, climbed down into the dinghy, and was rowed over the river to the bamboo landing.

Sending Robin Hood back with the boat the Sea Fox walked rapidly up to the hulk. Coming to the gangladder, he mounted this jauntily and leaped over the rail. His feet had hardly touched the deck when nine men, among whom he recognized one with the epaulets of a lieutenant, rushed out of the shadowed bulwarks and surrounded him, their drawn cutlasses gleaming in the starlight.

"Jumpin' Judith, lufftenant!" laughed the Sea Fox. "This here is a reg'lar surprise, ain't it. An' cussed if ye ain't got a reg'lar boardin' party. I ain't that tough be I?"

"Glad to see you take it this way, Captain Pepper," rejoined Mr. Lassan, his fine features brightening. "Rather have taken you on the high seas, though. Now, sergeant," he motioned to the sergeant of marines, who advanced and snapped a pair of handcuffs on the Sea Fox's wrists. The latter noted with no little satisfaction that they were of the same pattern as the ones he had experimented with.

The Sea Fox was then put into the cutter lying on the outside of the hulk, and in another ten minutes he was set aboard the frigate and ushered into the presence of the commodore. Murat was striding up and down on the thick cabin-carpet, under the brilliant rays of a big chased silver hanging lamp, and there was a look more of relief than triumph in his eyes as they fell on the little prisoner.

"So, Captain Pepper," he began smilingly, "you've decided to pay me a visit at last. Delighted to entertain you, I'm sure." He turned to the lieutenant. "You have searched him, I presume."

"Yes sir," said Mr. Lassan, and laid on the table the derringer and pen-knife he had taken from the slaver's pockets.

"Sure that is all, Mr. Lassan? We can't be too careful, y'know."

He went up to the Sea Fox and deftly patted his clothing from head to foot, the slaver meanwhile smiling and extending his arms apparently to facilitate the search.

"Very good, Mr. Lassan, your work was thorough. You may leave the prisoner with me, I will assume personal charge of him."

THE officer saluted and withdrew with his men. The commodore closed the door, and coming back, said, *"Mon Dieu,* Captain Pepper! You have the reputation of being so clever. Is it possible you were not aware that Trader Target's hulk was French territory?"

Raising his manacled hands the Sea Fox fished a toothpick from the pocket of his pongee shirt, placed it in his mouth and smiled a little ruefully.

"To be sure I knowed it was, commodore, but Duke Ephraim give me to understand that ye wouldn't molest me while I was in the river unless, in course, I was takin' natives aboard."

"Nor would I had you been a mere slaver, Captain Pepper. Evidently you forgot that you are an escaped convict. No agreement we have with the king provides for the immunity of such as you.

"Guess ye win, all right," conceded the Sea Fox. "But thar's jes' one thing I'd like to know. Did Target take any part in settin' that snare for me?"

"No, no, how could you possibly think that," said the commodore hurriedly. "I've had men aboard the hulk since the night of the day on which you arrived."

"Glad to hear that," said the Sea Fox. "I allus regarded Target as a friend, d'ye see. And," he added mentally, "Target will get his wine-shop in France." After a little pause he said, "If ye don't mind, commodore, I'd like to turn in somewhere. I've had ruther a busy day an' in course I never suspected this."

"Just a moment, captain, and I show you your room." The commodore went to a desk, pulled open a drawer, and took out a pair of shiny new handcuffs. To his dismay the Sea Fox saw that they were Poul-

let's patent. It would take him at least two hours to pick those locks with the wire he had concealed in his trousers waistband.

Commodore Murat snapped them on his wrists. "Double-irons for you, Captain Pepper. Your ability is too well known for you to be trusted with ordinary handcuffs. Now come with me."

He flung open the door of a stateroom and motioned the Sea Fox to enter. The latter found himself in a splendidly furnished little cabin with a deep wide berth.

"Get all the rest you can, my dear captain," advised the commodore. "Rear-Admiral Fusenot, the Governor of San Luiz, will be aboard tomorrow, and I want you to look well when you meet him."

"Thanks," smiled the little smuggler. "I'll try an' give him a hearty greeting."

"That is the proper spirit, Captain Pepper," approved the commodore, and bidding his prisoner good-night, he locked the door carefully.

ALONG about sundown, the following afternoon, the Sea Fox pricked up his ears at the sound of an unusual briskness over his head on the deck.

"Jumpin' Judith!" he exclaimed, "Here comes the Gov'nor of San Luiz or I'm a Dutchman!"

BOOM! The frigate trembled to the recoil of a twenty-four-pounder. Ten more guns were fired one after another, the eleven-gun salute accorded a visiting rear-admiral, and the Sea Fox knew that his surmises were correct.

"Now let's see," mused the Sea Fox. "I know the habits o' these navy folks pretty well an' I figger that the Gov'nor will have dinner fust, and arter his bilges is comfortably awash with champagne, he'll want to have a look at yours truly. Waal, I'll be ready fur him."

Cap'n Pepper glanced down at the double-irons on his wrists and chuckled. At the three meals served to him that day in his room the commodore and master-at-arms had been present and the commodore himself had relocked the irons when the prisoner had finished eating. And even an expert could not have told, unless he had taken the locks of the Poullet cuffs apart, that they had been tampered with in such a way that it only required a jerking movement of the wrists to spring them.

As the Sea Fox had conjectured, when dinner was over and cigars lighted, the Governor proposed to the commodore that they have a look at the famous prisoner. It was then just eight-fifteen by the cabin clock and a minute later the Sea Fox was aroused by the turning of the key in the lock and as the door swung open wide he found himself confronted by the commodore and a short, thick-set man with a square, broad-boned face and restless gray eyes. This little man was all rigged out in the bullion epaulets and gold buttons of a rear-admiral and wore a glittering star on his left breast. Of course the Sea Fox needed no one to tell him that he was looking at the governor of San Luis.

Elevating his eye-glasses the governor surveyed the prisoner for a long moment in much the manner of one inspecting some strange wild animal at the zoo, and then observed, "So this is that clever American slaver is it; h—mm. Commodore Murat, permit me to congratulate you on this capture. You have performed a signal service and I shall emphasize that fact in my dispatches which I am forwarding soon to the Admiralty."

He had a high, squeaky voice which struck the Sea Fox as being strangely odd, issuing from that deep chest.

Turning from the beaming commodore, the governor addressed the prisoner, "You may come out into the cabin, my man. There are some questions I should like to ask you. You of course may answer at discretion."

The Sea Fox bowed and followed them into the luxurious apartment paneled in rosewood and mahogany and stood as far away from the direct rays of the great hanging lamp as he could.

The two officers seated themselves near the center-table and the Governor began, "If you should tell us how you managed to escape from the prison at Brest, Captain, doubtless you will be treated less rigorously when you are placed on trial."

The Sea Fox smiled and advanced two steps toward them.

"Ye wanta know, I take it, jes' what means I employed to break jail, Gov'nor?"

"Quite right, my man," said the governor graciously, scenting a confession.

"*I escaped somethin' like this!*" said the Sea Fox, his voice low and vibrant with lethal earnestness.

THE words had hardly left his lips when to the officers' surprise and horror the shackles flew from his wrists and a double-barreled pistol leaped from some part of his clothing into his hand, the polished steel bores pointed directly at them.

"One yelp out o' ye for help an' ye are dead meat," he warned them. "Ye know me!"

Indeed they did know him. And they sat motionless, recalling vividly to mind the many instances of the terrific power which this little man by sheer force of character had exerted over his enemies.

"I see ye prefer to live," observed the Sea Fox smiling grimly. Now, commodore, pick up them handcuffs an' iron yerself an' the gov'nor, cross-fashion. Ye know how it's done. Better be quick about it, too, afore I go sorta crazy an' start shootin' regardless."

"For God's sake, commodore!" muttered the governor, the color of ashes, "do as he tells you. His eye is glaring like a maniac's already!"

Like one in a trance the commodore obeyed, and when the irons were on the Sea Fox stepped up and rapped the locks of the Poullet cuffs smartly with the butt of his pistol, thus resetting the springs with which he had tampered.

"Good enough!" approved the Sea Fox. "Now kindly march into that room I stayed in."

When they were in the room the Sea Fox said: "I don't wanta be too harsh with ye gentlemen. I s'pos I oughta gag ye but if ye'll give me yer word o' honor ye won't call for help inside o' a half-hour I won't humiliate ye that way."

"You have my word for it," promptly replied the Governor. "If I were gagged I'd be suffocated in no time. I can't breathe through my nose."

"How about ye, commodore? Gimme yer word?" asked the Sea Fox.

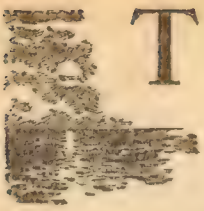
In a sullen tone the commodore agreed and the slaver locked them in the room. Then he crossed to the portieres at the back of the cabin and swept them back, disclosing a solid bulkhead.

"Here," the Sea Fox told himself, his heavy jaws clamping on his toothpick, "Here is where I've slipped. But I couldn't have foreseen this, nohow."

The bulkhead had been built in back of the gun-ports since Trader Target had visited the cabin and he had told the Sea Fox that he would have an unobstructed access to the ports. The slaver's original plan had been to overcome the commodore and then slip overboard out of one of the stern ports and swim to an old dismantled bark belonging to Duke Ephraim, anchored about a hundred yards down the river, where he would find a canoe waiting to convey him to the *Wild Pigeon*. Now the only way to get to the ports would be to leave the commodore's cabin, pass the sentry at the door, and also pass in plain sight of the officers in the ward-room before he reached the alley-way. Quite out of the question.

"Pepper," the Sea Fox told himself. "Ye are in a hell of a fix. Ye'll have to do some tall scratchin' to get outa this hole, an' that's a fact."

And then through an open door of a stateroom, the one allotted to the Governor, he caught sight of the rear-admiral's gold-laced chapeau and a cloak hanging against the bulkhead.



TEN minutes later the sentry before the door froze into attention and saluted as the governor passed him hurriedly and made for the gangway. The junior officer on watch espied the cocked hat and naval cloak by the light of the gangway-lantern and hurried up to him in some trepidation, for the little governor was known to be rather eccentric in his ways.

"Lieutenant," snapped the governor in his high squeaky voice, his face averted over the gangway. Dispense with all ceremony and get a boat here for me as quickly as possible. It is imperative that I see the King of Calabar at once."

He spoke in Spanish but the officer attributed this to the fact that as there were men about he didn't wish them to know the business he was going on.

In a twinkling a boat was gotten ready and the governor in almost indecent haste for one of his standing hurried down the gangladder, got into the boat and gave the order to shove off. Eight minutes later the governor was stepping ashore on the landing and without so much as a word to the boat-crew he scampered away and vanished amidst a group of palms.

"Queer old coot, that governor," commented one of the sailors. "I've an idea he's about half-seas over. Did any of you notice he ain't got no coat on under that cloak. His hat was wrong side first and damned if he wasn't wearing his sword on the starboard side. Must be pretty drunk, eh, mates?"

Presently the eyes of the officer on watch on the *Araignee* nearly popped from his head as he saw the *Wild Pigeon,* her towering canvas like two peaks of snow in the moonlight, come flying down the river. The officer at once sounded the general alarm, but it being Sunday night, the weekday discipline had been relaxed and before the singing, wine-drinking crew could respond and go to their stations the brigantine was upon them.

The next instant an electric thrill went through the ship's complement as the sultry African river suddenly reverberated to the roar of an eighteen-pounder close aboard. The *Wild Pigeon* was merely giving a parting salute, however—a blank charge—and immediately swerved back on her course like a gull dipping its wing. And by the time the frigate's crew, working against wind and tide had hauled on the spring to their cable so as to get a broadside to bear the *Wild Pigeon,* going like a race-horse, had flashed out of sight behind the high bluffs of Dindo Point. She would, wind and weather permitting, never stop again this side of America.

While the first lieutenant was staring at the point where the slaver had vanished a quartermaster came up and reported that he had seen a little man wearing an admiral's cloak standing on the poop of the slaver and waving a gold-laced chapeau as she flew past.

Upon hearing this the first lieutenant was seized by a dread suspicion. Rushing down into the commodore's cabin and hearing some one kicking on the stateroom door his worst fears were realized as he unlocked it and beheld his two superiors shackled together—the governor minus his trousers.

On the table the Sea Fox had left a hasty scrawl addressed to Duke Ephraim and requesting him to reimburse the governor for the loss of his wearing apparel and the sword and to charge it to the Sea Fox's account.

The little governor read it and chuckled. Unlike the commodore, he was a good loser.

"Call him slaver, pirate, or what you will, commodore," he observed, "but I can't help feeling that there is something really great about a man who will take the chances he does. And another thing, commodore, there is no doubt but that he feels he is engaged in a worthy trade and that we have no right to interfere. But I think I shall take him up, after all, on his offer to buy me new trousers!"

KULTUS JIM

By ELLIOTT W. MICHENER and JACK LAIRD
Authors of "Dead Easy," "Thirty Pieces of Silver," etc.

Kultus Jim the Sicani was just plain ornery. Even old McQuarrie, the Hudson's Bay factor, wouldn't stake Jim to winter's grub. And it was only through bitter experience that Jim came to realize the truth of a certain saying: "We sure go downstream whizzing—but it's hell a-coming back!"

THE ghostly, flickering radiance in the northern sky was giving way to dismal dawn. A cold breath of wind blew the white ash from the dead brands of the camp-fire and sent the last leaf of the big aspen on the river bank, yellow and rimed with frost, fluttering sadly down within an inch of Kultus Jim's nose. The Sicani saw it and shivered. He drew a long breath, flung off his rabbit-skin robe, and got up to rekindle the fire.

While the fire was blazing up he took the red squares of duffle flannel from the sticks where he had left them to dry and wrapped them about his lean brown feet before putting on his moccasins. The duffle, which served in place of socks, was threadbare and full of holes. It reminded him sharply that he had a hard winter ahead. The best of mooschide won't stave off frostbite when it's sixty below.

He spitted the carcass of a snowshoe rabbit on a long stick over the fire. It sizzled odorously in the heat but awakened no enthusiasm. Kultus Jim, like most residents of the North, didn't care for rabbit meat, which is dry and fibrous. But he could pretend it was moose and that would help some. He lit his old pipe and began to puff, screwing up his face in the effort of pretending that it was loaded with tobacco

instead of kinnikinic. Presently he would make a billy full of tea to wash down the rabbit. Not real tea, but "Hudson Bay"—made from the leaves of a small shrub that grew in the muskegs—and again he would have to pretend. The stuff was bitter as caribou gall and Kultus Jim had no sugar. So he'd have to pretend he didn't like sugar. There was no salt for the rabbit, either, and that meant some more pretending. It entered his mind that he was going to do a lot of pretending before the winter was over, for yesterday the trader at Pelly House, two hours paddle up the river, had refused to advance him anything for the trapping season. Jim's debt to the company was too big. In vain he had pleaded. Old McQuarrie had not only declined to outfit him with such luxuries as flour and sugar, but had even refused him a block of sulphur matches. The dour Scot had lectured him severely, saying that he had the improvidence of a grasshopper and the prankish irresponsibility of a black bear cub; in short, that he was just plain *kultus,* and would never be anything else.

Kultus sighed as he took the billy-can down to the edge of the river for water. The old trader was probably right, a man is never nicknamed for nothing. *Kultus* he was born and *kultus* he would die. It was his fate.

THERE was a sudden sound of voices, high-pitched and angry, as a big dugout canoe floated past the point above. The craft, which was heavily loaded with tarpaulined bundles and manned by two white men, was behaving in a way that betokened inexperienced rivermen. Kultus Jim stood as still as a deer at a drinking place, watching them through the lifting gray.

"Paddle on the other side!" shouted the hard-visaged yellow-whiskered man in the stern as the canoe swung broadside in the current.

"What difference does it make!" retorted the bowsman. "If you knew how to handle the damn thing——" The canoe swerved erratically and rammed its prow onto the pebbly beach. "Now look what you've done!"

"Maybe you could do better, Mr. Tom Gregory," sneered the other.

"I might, but I ain't gonna try." Gregory leaped ashore. "I've had enough."

"Whose idea was it to come down the river in the first place?" demanded the man in the canoe with an oath.

"Don't cuss me, Ben Jairl!" Gregory's hand moved toward the revolver at his belt.

"Lay off," growled Jairl. "It's to our interest to keep cool till we're out of the country, ain't it?"

"I reckon so," agreed Gregory sullenly, twisting nervous fingers through the sparse black beard that did little to hide a wolfishness that snarled from every twisted line in his face. "But I don't want any more of this canoe business. If we can't run the thing any better in smooth water, what's gonna happen when we get down the river where those rapids an' canyons are?"

Jairl climbed out and hauled the canoe further up the bank. "We got grub enough to hit overland toward the Telegraph Trail—but we'd have to ditch the stuff."

"That's better than gettin' drowned, ain't it?"

Jairl didn't answer. A pebble turned beneath the foot of Kultus Jim, fifty feet away, and both men whirled about, drawing their revolvers.

"It's only a Siwash!" chuckled Jairl in relief.

They thrust their revolvers back into their holsters and exchanged faint nods of understanding. Then they walked toward the Indian.

"Hey, Charlie," greeted Gregory affably, "you likum job take us down the river in canoe?"

Kultus Jim looked at them blankly.

"Try that lingo of yours on him," advised Gregory. "Talk to him first about something to eat," he added craftily. "He's probably hungry as hell."

"Mika tikkic muckamuck?" asked Jairl, who spoke Chinook by virtue of having spent a winter in jail with two Haida fish-trap robbers on the coast.

"Muckamuck! Food—eat!"

That was something Kultus could always understand. *"Nowitka!"* he answered with a broad grin.

"Might as well stop and have breakfast," said Jairl to Gregory. "We'll talk to him afterward."

They brought a grub box from the canoe and carried it up to the fire. While Jairl made a pot of coffee, Gregory fried long strips of bacon. They gave a tin plate to Kultus and sat down themselves to eat.

KULTUS filled his plate happily and looked contemptuously at the charring rabbit meat. He ate and ate. The white men finished but still he kept eating. Bacon lean and dark, good Hudson's Bay hardtack, dried potatoes, real coffee and sugar in it. No need of pretending now!

Gregory pointed to a thirty-thirty carbine leaning against a spruce-tree. "He's got a gun."

Jairl went casually and picked up the rifle. He worked the lever and peered into the chamber. "It ain't loaded," he reported. "Do you reckon——"

"Naw; if he had any cartridges, they'd be in the gun," stated Gregory emphatically.

Jairl put the Indian's rifle down. "Say," he said on sudden thought, "this feller must be the Siwash old McQuarrie was tellin' us about yesterday afternoon. Kultus Jim he called him."

"It must be," agreed Gregory. He studied the lithe form of the native for a moment. Then he snapped his fingers suddenly. "Ben, I got a peach of an idea."

As Kultus Jim heard his name a faint gleam of interest came into his eyes, but he went on eating in complete satisfaction.

"What's your idea?" asked Jairl. "Something about him?" he nodded toward the Sicani.

"Yeah. I ain't got it all figgered out yet," Gregory confessed, "but I got the start of it. You mind what old McQuarrie said about the Siwash being all burnt up when he wouldn't give him no flour an' stuff?"

"I see what you're drivin' at," mused Jairl.

Gregory nodded.

"Well, we'll come to that later," said Jairl. "The first thing is to fix it up with him about takin' us down the river." He began to dicker in slow and laborious Chinook.

"Tell him anything," cut in Gregory impatiently. "What difference does it make?"

Jairl promised *muckamuck* for the trip and *chickamin*—money—enough to buy a complete outfit when they reached Fort MacDonald. Kultus Jim, as soon as he understood, assented readily. He brought his rabbit robe and empty rifle down and stowed them among the white man's big bundles. The rest of his meager possessions he abandoned with cheerful contempt.

Leaving his own canoe beached high above the water, he selected a paddle and took his place in the stern of the white men's craft. With Gregory in the bow and Jairl amidship they shoved off and went spinning away on the swift rolling stream. Under his skillful guidance the canoe held straight in its course as an arrow, through good water and bad. The white men at first had tried to help the craft along by paddling vigorously. But they grew tired at last.

"What's the use wearin' ourselves out?" said Gregory. "There ain't no chance of them comin' down the river for a long spell yet."

"That sure was a good idea of mine to split up old McQuarrie's canoes," boasted Jairl, settling himself in comfortable idleness on the bottom. He filled his pipe complacently. "I been thinkin' that as soon as this is over I'd take a little trip to Montreal. There's some swell dives in that town."

"Not for me," said Gregory. "I'm gonna take in Californy. That's the rich man's country."

"Well," said Jairl, an expansive grin wrinkling his hard features, "if it comes to that, there ain't nothing to prevent takin' in both places. I was thinkin' I might even take a whirl at Paris an' Monte Carlo."

KULTUS JIM, left to himself in the stern, sang over and over one of those meaningless little Chinook songs which gives melancholy though satisfying expression to the soul of the native voyageur.

"Mama Clahoya, nika tenas,
Mama Clahoya—konaway nesika!"

"What you reckon he's thinkin' about?" said Jairl with a wink.

"He's thinkin'," said Gregory, "in his simple, savage way of all them beads and blankets an' stuff he's gonna buy when we get to Fort MacDonald!"

Both men roared with laughter.

Jairl sobered. "That rifle of his is empty, but don't you reckon he might have some shells cached on him some place?"

"Lemme see the rifle," said Gregory, closing one eye slowly.

Jairl lifted Jim's Winchester and handed it toward Gregory.

"Don't drop it!" warned Gregory. There was a splash as the weapon struck the water. "Now look what you've done. Gone an' lost the man's gun! I told you not to drop it."

"Well," said Jairl, with quick philosophy, "there ain't no use in cryin' over spilt milk. That water's fifty feet deep."

Kultus Jim stopped paddling with an exclamation as he saw his rifle drop from sight. He looked at the white men with mingled astonishment and reproach. But when Jairl promised he would replace the carbine with a brand new one at Fort MacDonald, he regained his composure. He seemed glad of the accident, even, since he was to profit by it.

The canoe leaped into a short rapid. The white men paled beneath their beards and grabbed at the gunwales. Kultus Jim smiled at their fright and with careless strokes sent the craft flashing in and out among the black boulders that combed the white water like the snagged teeth of some riparian monster.

"Whoopee!" yelled Jairl in the reaction of relief as the canoe shot into the safe water below. "Monte Carlo or bust!"

Gregory's relief was almost hysterical. "You sure come down these rivers a-whizzin'—but it must be hell a-comin' back!"

On they went down the breast of the silvery rushing tide. Gregory and Jairl grew accustomed to the frequent rapids, and in the stretches of slack water they amused themselves by potting with their six-guns at the beaver and south-bound geese and brant. Kultus Jim steeped his soul in the melancholy happiness of song. From time to time he cast curious glances at the big tarpaulin-wrapped bundles that almost filled the canoe.

By nightfall they had gone seventy miles or more. The white men were in good spirits, and Kultus Jim, with three good meals under his quill-embroidered belt, seemed on the point of losing his native stolidity. He smiled at the Chinook sallies of the yellow-whiskered Jairl, but always when on the verge of laughter he sobered himself under the pretense of keeping his head from the camp-fire smoke. He was trying hard to keep in mind that he was Kultus Jim and that good fortune never stayed with him long if he became too happy or irresponsible.

The next morning when they were loading the canoe he couldn't resist the temptation to pry curiously into one of the big bales.

"Hey!" snarled Jairl suddenly, drawing his revolver. "Keep your paws out of that!"

There was no mistaking the sinister intention of the white man's eyes. Kultus shrank away. There was something in those bundles they didn't want him to see. Silently he got into the canoe and stood ready to push off. Jairl replaced his gun and he and Gregory got in.

"You've got him scared," said Gregory an hour later. Kultus had become moody and his dark eyes held their focus far beyond the heads of the white men on the turns of the river. "You hadn't oughter made that gun-play."

"You're always findin' fault. What the hell difference does it make?"

"He might take a notion to leave us," Gregory pointed out.

And that, it appeared from a sudden leap Kultus made toward the spruce timber when they stopped at noon to make a billy of tea, was just what the Indian had been thinking of.

Jairl's revolver cracked and Kultus stopped suddenly. "You ain't goin' nowhere, Mr. Ab-riginee," the white man growled, herding Jim back to the fire.

Kultus looked toward the woods like a hunted animal, but he composed himself at last and stoically managed to eat a fair meal.

THAT night when they made camp the white men took watch about, revolver in hand, to see that the canoeman didn't escape.

"We don't want to kill him if we can get out of it," said Gregory. "There's some mighty bad water ahead an' we need him."

"Maybe so," retorted Jairl. "But he wouldn't be any use to us if he got away. And——" he looked significantly at the bundles in the canoe—"he'd talk. You shoot to kill if he makes any sudden moves."

It was nearing daybreak when Gregory dozed off for an instant. Kultus Jim opened his eyes cautiously, saw the revolver sagging as the white man's head dropped wearily. Stealthily he threw off the rabbit robe and began to creep from the circle of fire-light. Gregory awoke suddenly. Instead of shooting he leaped and struck the Indian a stunning blow behind the ear with his gun barrel. As Kultus writhed on his side, the barrel cracked down cuttingly again across his forehead.

When Kultus sat up ten minutes later, looking dazedly at the blood he had wiped from his eyes, the white men were standing watchfully like two wolves over their kill.

"They're harder than a dog to kill," laughed Gregory in relief. "He'll be all right when he eats his breakfast."

The Indian drank a cup of unsweetened coffee, rolling his eyes the while in troubled fashion, but he refused food.

"Just as you say, Mr. Siwash," sneered Jairl. With their guns they drove him into the canoe, and once more they were on their way.

"That gun-play of yours started all this trouble," said Gregory morosely. "We'll have to watch him like a hawk from now on."

"Yeah," admitted Jairl, who now sat facing the Indian, revolver in hand. "An' it's gonna complicate things when we get to Fort McDonald."

"Listen," said Gregory suddenly. "I got the rest of that idea I had yesterday." The swishing of the Indian's paddle went on without interruption. Gregory looked at the canoe's cargo thoughtfully. "These furs would 'a' been too heavy to carry out of the country overland. What's more, old McQuarrie knows it, an' naturally he's gonna figure somebody took 'em down the river. Seein' as we ain't canoemen, he's gonna be slow to suspect us."

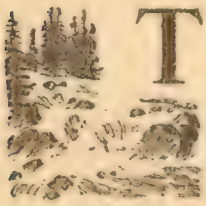
"Maybe so," said Jairl doubtfully.

"But this Siwash," Gregory went on. "is a good canoeman an' on top of that he's got a reputation of being *kultus*. Old McQuarrie will remember him gettin' sore when he wouldn't let him have any outfit an' he's liable to put two and two together. If this feller was to disappear an' never show up again, wouldn't he be blamed for the robbery instead of us?"

"I got you," said Jairl approvingly. "Say no more, Tom; say no more." He looked calculatingly at the moody face of Kultus Jim, who as usual was alertly watching the river ahead. "You sure go downstream a-whizzin'—but it's hell a-comin' back!"

The great stream ran on between lanes

of dark spruce-trees whose tops etched themselves cathedrally against the gray sky. The somber beauty of the wilderness awoke no response in the hearts of the two whites, but the soul of Kultus Jim seemed wrenched with every yearning look he cast ashore. It was the hinterland of his trapping ground and with every mile his face grew darker with the sadness of parting.



THE country began to change. Rapids became more frequent. A forest-clad mountain slope rose from each side of the river. Kultus Jim, with his eyes far ahead, broke into melancholy song again. At times his voice rose in a long-drawn note that was like the wailing, far-reaching cry of a loon.

Gregory shivered. "For God's sake, make him shut up!" he cried hoarsely. "That yowlin' gives me the willies."

"Aw, let him sing, if it'll keep his mind off his troubles." said Jairl. "They're kinda like a bad nigger; it makes 'em happy to get the blues. I remember once they hanged a Siwash at Kamloops. When he got up on the scaffold he took one last look around at the hills an' then let out one of them long, dyin' howls. They say he didn't mind bein' hanged a bit after that."

Gregory brooded for a long while upon this instance of Indian stoicism, and renunciation. "Do you reckon he suspicions what we're gonna do with him?" he asked anxiously.

"Naw; he's just scared because I made that gun-play."

"Well, in that case we're settin' pretty," said Gregory relaxing.

"Nothing else," grinned Jairl evilly. The current suddenly grew swifter. "We sure go down stream a-whizzin'—but it's hell a-comin' back!"

"It is indeed!" said Kultus Jim.

The white men whirled their heads, startled by the words of English. The color ebbed from their faces.

"Damnation!" croaked Jairl. "He savvies English!"

Gregory choked out a sudden torrent of obscene abuse. "You dirty, double-crossin' Siwash——"

"You insisted on speaking Chinook when you hired me," said Kultus with a wicked laugh.

Jairl looked at Gregory furtively, seeking counsel. His hand closed on the butt of his revolver.

"Might as well," Gregory agreed in a dry voice. "We gotta do it sooner or later anyway."

Kultus Jim's jaw seemed to tighten under a faint excitement, but he betrayed no other emotion when Jairl raised his big six-gun.

"Go ahead!" urged Gregory as Jairl hesitated.

Jairl's lips tightened in determination and he raised the gun again. Then once more he lowered the muzzle as a sudden sound from downstream broke upon their ears. It wasn't the steady purling roar of a rapid, but an intermittent booming, which, to the experienced riverman, is a sure sign of a dangerous canyon. Jairl listened, fascinated. Tense and stoical, Kultus Jim looked straight before him. They swept around a turn, and before them rose the rock portals of a gorge where the quarter-mile width of the river choked itself through a barrier reef to lose itself in a turmoil of wild white water.

"Hey!" shouted Gregory in alarm. "This must be the Hell Gate——"

His fright was infectious. "Let us out an' we'll portage the canoe," ordered Jairl.

A strange look flashed into the Indian's face. He wiped the blood from his eyes and riveted his attention on the line of spray ahead.

"Hey!" shouted Jairl. "This is the Hell Gate Canyon!"

"I know it," said Kultus Jim, his inscrutable face set toward the watery inferno ahead. "The worst canyon in the Northwest."

"Shoot him!" begged Gregory, panic-stricken. "We're goners if we don't get ashore!"

The roaring of the canyon grew louder.

The canoe swept on like a leaf in a mill-race.

Jairl raised his revolver. "Turn this thing ashore!" he yelled with an oath. He jabbed the muzzle of the Colt toward the Indian's middle.

Kultus Jim laughed. "My way is the best!" he shouted vengefully. He looked lingeringly at the distant shore; then at the maw of the canyon ahead. Suddenly he rose to his feet. Above the deafening roar his voice ascended in a long wailing cry. He dug in his paddle—and the big cottonwood leaped straight toward the middle of the reef ahead.

"Turn back! Turn back!" screamed Jairl.

With a savage stiffening of his arm, he trained the gun on the Indian's heart. As he fired Gregory struck him violently across the shoulder with his paddle and the bullet went wild.

"Cut it out, you damn fool!" shouted Gregory. "He's gonna take us through all right!"

"He's gonna drown us!" yammered Jairl. "He's gonna drown us!"

KULTUS JIM'S white teeth flashed. He yelled again. The canoe plunged through a narrow opening in the reef and into the white water below. The two white men clung to the gunwales, awed by the tumult about them, too stunned to think of paddling or even to bail the water that came aboard when they wallowed through a broken comber. On they shot, twisting and tossing among the giant billows and cross swells, past great walls of spray that marked sunken reefs, past black rocks behind which fatal whirlpools roared and sucked dizzily.

"Hudson's Bay!" yelled Kultus Jim. "Hudson's Bay!" It was the ancient phrase of the Company *voyageur,* survival of the Northwest struggle, the rallying cry of racing crews, the victory song, the desperate shout of canoe captains calling for steerage-way. With every wrenching stroke of his great spruce paddle his voice rose wildly, joyously. "Hudson's Bay! Hudson's Ba-a-ay!"

The canyon widened and the water grew less rough. In the middle of this quieter stretch a flat-topped island of rock plowed the flood like a small battleship. Straight toward the spume flung off by the island bow, Kultus urged the canoe. A paddle-length away he swerved slightly and they shot along in the shadow of the grim rock. Below the square stern of the island a double eddy whirled gently. As the bow of the canoe passed the rock Kultus Jim thrust down hard with his paddle. The big cottonwood shot out of the canyon race and into the eddy like a projectile. And there it hung, caught and held from the current like the foam and flotsam that covered the water there. With half a dozen easy strokes he brought the stern of the canoe to the island. He sprang out with a yell of triumph, still holding to the stern to keep the craft from drifting.

The white men looked about them in bewilderment. A hundred feet of swift water separated them from either shore. A hundred yards below, the canyon narrowed again and the black fangs of a reef gnawed the spray. There wasn't much danger of the canoe pulling loose from Kultus Jim's hand and drifting out of the eddy, but when the white men saw the reef downstream and had listened for a moment to its snarling din, their terror sprang up anew.

"Get back in here!" bellowed Jairl, training his gun.

Kultus Jim's white teeth flashed in a gleeful snarl, but he made no move.

"Don't scare him!" warned Gregory, "or he'll let go the canoe!"

Jairl started crawling toward the stern, but Kultus Jim made a movement of relinquishing his grip and the white man stopped. He tried threats and curses again, but Kultus only mocked him.

Gregory looked at the reef downstream. Then he looked back at the Indian and tried a new tack. "Take us through and we'll pay you a thousand dollars, Jim," he

shouted. "Come on. We ain't gonna hurt you!"

"It is too dangerous," said Kultus Jim. "Look!" He pointed to a number of weather-grayed crosses of pine that were fastened to the sloping canyon walls just below the reef. "Seven men of the Hudson's Bay were drowned there once. There have been many more. It is too dangerous."

"Well, what do you aim to do?" asked Jairl in a calmer voice. "Stay here in this eddy till we starve?"

"No," said Kultus. "It is not bad water here. I could reach the shore with the canoe before we drifted down to those rocks."

"Yeah, an' then what?" asked Gregory.

"We could put a rope bridle on the bow, and line the canoe back up to the head of the canyon."

THE white men seized on this sudden straw of hope. "Take us ashore," said Jairl tremulously, 'an we'll fix you up for life!"

"Very well," said Kultus. "But first you must give me your revolvers."

"We'll see you in hell first!" they raged in unison.

Kultus smiled. "If you don't want to give me your guns, I don't want them. I am not a pig. You can take the canoe ashore yourself."

Both men laughed hollowly at the absurdity of this. They took counsel of each other and settled back with the intention of playing a waiting game. "We can stand it as long as you can, Mr. Siwash," grinned Jairl.

But before five minutes had passed they were shaking again from nervous strain. Kultus sat on a rock and smiled at them. He loosened his grip on the canoe for an instant. With a look of fright they unbuckled their revolvers and Jairl crept near the stern and handed them out on a paddle.

"Thank you, gentlemen; thank you," said Kultus. "I have always wanted to own two revolvers." He buckled both belts around his waist.

He took his place in the stern. "We'll head out of the eddy and cross the current. I'll turn into the eddy below that point there above the reef!"

A half minute later they had made the crossing and had climbed ashore. Gregory took the towing line and fastened a bridle to the bow under Kultus Jim's direction. An hour of arduous work along the sloping rock wall and they had reached the still water above the canyon.

"Thank God that's over!" said Jairl fervently.

"I wouldn't go through that again for a million dollars," said Gregory, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"An' we're much obliged, Jim," said Jairl ingratiatingly. "We'll just take a little grub an' hit overland now. You can have our outfit if you want it."

Kultus Jim pointed the revolver. "Fasten that tow line to your shoulders," he commanded.

"You expect us to haul you clean back up this river to Pelly House?" gasped Gregory.

"Well, I thought—in my simple savage way—that you might prefer that to being shot."

Jairl looked long and earnestly at the Indian and at the revolver he held. "You win," he said at last. "But before we start," he added morosely, "do you mind tellin' us how you come to speak English when none of the other Sicanis around here do?"

"I went to the mission school at Fort St. James when I was small," explained Kultus. "Later on I was one of the Indians the Government took to England for the coronation. I went to school there for two years more." He took his seat in the stern.

"Can you beat it!" growled Gregory. "A educated Siwash!"

"It didn't do me much good," confessed Kultus. He reached into the grub box and brought out a disc of hard-tack. Spreading it with jam, he began to munch complacently. "Old McQuarrie said it spoiled me

and made me *kultus*. Maybe he was right."

He motioned them ahead. Jairl's face darkened in rebellion.

"Give in to him," warned Gregory in a whisper. "We'll get him tonight. He can't stay awake forever."

A BIG canoe manned by five Indians shot around the point above. At a command from the grizzled white man who sat amidships the craft swerved suddenly and headed for shore.

"The jig's up!" said Jairl hoarsely. "It's old McQuarrie!" He made a movement of flinging off the tow line.

Kultus Jim's gun cracked warningly. "Stand where you are!"

The factor and his crew leaped ashore. A moment later they had ringed themselves about the two thieves, rifles at the ready.

"Kultus Jim!" exclaimed McQuarrie. "How in——"

"These men have been acting very suspiciously, Mr. McQuarrie," said Jim solemnly.

"Suspiciously!" snorted the trader. "They slugged Baptiste Yuz the watchman and made off with the fall catch." He made a gesture of cautioning his men. "Don't take any chances with them, boys." He leaped to the canoe and searched among the bundles. "It's all here, I guess," he panted in relief. "Kultus Jim, how did you do it?"

"Well——" began Kultus modestly. Briefly he recounted his experience with Jairl and Gregory.

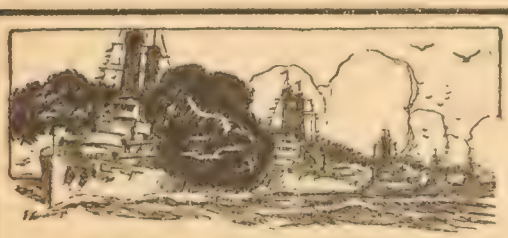
"You're not so *kultus*, Jim," laughed McQuarrie happily. "Anyway if you are, you can afford to be for the rest of your life."

Kultus Jim looked at the frayed duffle peeping above the tops of his moccasins. "There's a hard winter ahead," he sighed.

"What do you care?" roared McQuarrie. "Fifty thousand dollars worth of furs, London prices—d'ye think the Company's going to forget that? Not on your life!"

Arrangements were made for the return to Pelly House. The fur-laden canoe, with Jairl and Gregory at the tow line, the factor sitting amidships and Kultus in the stern, took the lead, while the Company's craft followed. With hardening faces the fur thieves set their shoulders to the strain of the rope and began to walk along the rocky shore. An hour later, when the roar of the canyon was far behind them and they were resting after struggling up a brisk rapid, Jairl wiped the sweat from his eyes and cursed long and feelingly.

Smilingly Kultus Jim regarded him from his comfortable seat in the stern of the canoe. "We sure go down stream a-whizzing," he mused—"but it's hell a-coming back!"



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Not every horse on the Western ranges is a cow-horse—not by a long shot! Horses differ in their professions, just as men—and this article explains how and why. Written by Reeves Axtell, of Arizona, and decorated with some of our collection of drawings from the pen of Ross Santee, the Arizona cowboy artist—it's right salty readin'!

THIS swivel-tailed star-gazer ain't fit for anything but wranglin'!"

Even if you hadn't understood them words that the cowboy was using, you'd have knowed, just by the tone of his voice, that he wasn't exactly braggin' on the horse he was leadin' out of the remuda. Most likely, not just knowin' what he meant by "swivel-tailed star-gazer," you'd have wondered why he'd talk that way about a fine lookin', upstandin', eagle-eyed geldin' like the one on the end of his rope. Maybe you'd even get the idea that that cowboy was one of these natural horse-haters, dislikin' horses the way some few people hates music or kids or things of that kind.

Well, that wasn't the case. That cowboy was just plumb crazy about a good horse and there wasn't anything he'd rather do than to throw his saddle on a good one and go out and eat dust and alkali around a millin' herd of cows. But he was sure hatin' to ride the horse he had there on his line. The outfit was goin' out to make a drive in a lot of rough, brushy hill-country and just lookin' at that horse, knowin' it like he did, was sure makin' him dread his mornin's work. You see he hadn't misnamed the horse when he called it a swivel-tailed star-gazer, and them words meant a lot. They meant that the horse had two of the worst habits a pony can have, at least from a cowboy's point of view. One of those habits was that everytime he felt a spur touch him he'd switch his tail around at it, and there was always danger that he'd get a bunch of those long hairs tangled up in a rowel, either when the cowboy was ridin' along or when he was dismountin' and throwin' his leg around over the horse's rump. A tanglement like that can cause a rider a heap of grief, and sometimes gets him badly hurt.

But the other habit, star-gazin', was the

worst. For a star-gazer is sure dangerous to be sittin' on when you've got to turn loose and go bustin' down a rocky, treacherous slope after a bunch of wild cattle that's just about makin' a clean getaway. At such times a star-gazer will kind of lay his head back on your shoulder and, never seein' the ground nor the loose stones and ditches, go flyin 'along sort of studyin' astronomy. If his feet happen to land in any one of about a million wrong places he's most sure to turn over four or five times before he stops rollin' and you'll be lucky if the boys manage to carry you to the wagon all in one piece. So, now, maybe you'll be able to see why some of these fine lookin' horses is mighty near worthless to a cowboy.

YOU'LL hear a cowboy talk about the horses in the remuda and call 'em lots of different names, like "bronc," "agate-head," "circle horse," "rope horse" or "cuttin' horses." If he mentions broom-tails or fuzz-tails—broomies or fuzzies—he's talkin' about something else; the wild mares, out on the range, that are the mammies of about all the geldin's in the remuda. But when you hear him say that a certain pony is a "cow-horse" you can know he's givin' that horse a mighty high recommend. He don't have to say a *good* cow-horse, for a cow-horse is either good or he isn't a cow-horse. Contrary to the notions lots of people have that any horse a cowboy rides around cattle is a cow-horse, animals deservin' of the name aren't any too common, even on the big ranches where the wagon stays out on the range for most of the year, and you'll never see a mount, that wasn't got together special, that is made up of cow-horses all the way through.

When a hand hires out to an outfit at roundup time he isn't generally, given his string all at once—not unless the boss already knows him—but gets his ponies pointed out to him one at a time as the boss sizes him up and decides whether or not the top-horses will be wasted on him. If he's showin' up to be a first-class hand

one that can be trusted in the herd at "carvin'" or cuttin' out, and ropin' the calves that need brandin', he gets maybe three of the best cow-horses in the remuda; horses that, some of them, will bring foxy old steers out of the herd without hardly a touch of the rein and that seem to know, almost without bein' showed, just what animal is wanted next. After that he gets three more. These will probably be good young horses that are learnin' fast but ain't real cow-horses yet. The boss wants a tophand to have them because he knows a horse can't learn any more than his rider knows, and he figures the cowboy will teach them a lot before the work is over. Then the cowboy gets his pick—likely two—of a bunch of half-broke colts! horses that's just got the rough edge taken off but are actin' a little sensible, and maybe one good old horse that's gettin' pretty well along in years but ain't quite ready to be condemned and turned out on the range. It won't be long till *that* horse's workin' days is over. Maybe the next rainy season will see him slipped loose to run out on the ridges by himself, where he'll graze around or stand in the shade of a big mesquite bush and nibble the beans and sort of dream about cattle and herds and the days when he was right much of a cow-horse. But in the meantime, as long as he's fit to do any work at all, he'd rather stay in the remuda and have a good, understandin' cowboy ride him easy once in a while. That horse won't get much ridin' and the cowboy will treat him good, only usin' him for a night horse or at times when he's on day-herd and just has to sit around and watch the gathered cattle pick herbs on an open hillside and the two of them, horse and rider, can take little cat-naps through the day. Most likely, if the day-herd is quiet, the cowboy will be off of him a lot of the time, sittin' in his shade, or leadin' him up to mesquite bushes and slippin' his bridle so he can get at the mesquite beans handier.

BUT, gettin' back to that cowboy's mount; the old horse fills out a string of nine head, and there's only three cow-horses in the lot. So you see what I'm drivin' at when I say that real cow-horses is like real smart people, not bein' common enough to glut the market for brains.

If a hand is a "cotton-picker" or "lint" —meanin' he's a green hand, just a country boy from the cotton fields of Texas, or

somewhere, that's never done any real cow work to speak of—he'll get mounted on a string of tag-end stuff, spoiled, unteachable horses, that would make that tophand roll his bed and call for his time the very first day out from the headquarters ranch.

A feller like that greenhorn couldn't ride the broncs or the half-broke horses—some of them he couldn't even get in a corral with—and he'd be certain to spoil any of the good young ponies that was showin' signs of learnin' to be cow-horses some day.

Between the tophand and the cotton-picker there'll be a bunch of fairly good hands with the outfit; good boys that's just average, not quite knowin' enough or responsible enough to qualify as tophands. These fellers get the in-between horses that are fairly good for ordinary work; horses that's a lot like the boys that's goin' to ride them: plenty serviceable and willin', but lackin' that outstandin' something that puts them at the top. Of course the bronc riders or "peelers," or whatever you want to call them, are in a class by themselves and don't ride anything but the raw broncs, or owl-heads. The boss don't expect them or their mounts to do much but help on the morning drives and maybe stop up a hole around the herd or hold up a cut or work like that. For if you hurry a bronc too much with cow work he gets bewildered and pretty soon he's just a bonehead that has growed stubborn and past learnin'.

EVERYBODY in an outfit takes lots of interest in the half-broke horses the bronc-riders are workin' out. A bronc-rider will come in to the remuda for a change and, while he's pullin' his saddle off of a sweaty back, he'll say, "This feller's comin' on. He looked at a cow today!"—meanin' the bronc is beginnin' to take notice of what all the stoppin' and startin' and quick turnin' around is about. From then on all the boys is watchin' that horse, and, if he keeps

on "lookin' at the cows," it won't be long till one or more of the boys is askin' the boss for permission to take the colt and finish his education. For every cowboy loves to train a teachable horse.

On the other hand, if a bronc rider says of a certain horse, "This agate-headed thing is so ignorant I can't even show him a cow," the boys will all try to dodge gettin' him in their strings—unless he's got a mighty fine road gait, or is extra fast, some good qualifications that has nothing to do with cows—and that horse will most likely develop into a cold-jawed hammer-head that will be hated by anybody that finally gets him.

Cow-horses never get ridden on "circle" —the long drives to bring the cattle in from the range to the roundup grounds, but they get mighty hard work after the herd is throwed together and the cuttin' out is started. Cuttin' cattle from a big herd is fast, strainin' work, 'specially when the stuff to be cut is wild or big steers that seem to be just naturally contrary about leavin' a roundup. A steady afternoon of such work would about kill off any horse. So, most always, the boys that do the cuttin'-out work in relays, two or three goin' in the herd and cuttin' till their horses begin to slow down, and then ridin' out and lettin' their mounts rest at an easy place on the side of the round-up where there's no cuttin' goin' on while some more boys go in and keep the cattle siftin' out to the cuts.

There isn't a prettier sight in the world —not to a cowboy that loves a good horse —than an extra top cow-horse comin' out of a herd on the hocks of a big three- or four-year-old steer, the steer rompin' and dodgin' and schemin' every way a steer can scheme to keep from leavin' his range partners behind, and that horse, workin' on a loose rein—I've seen 'em so good you could throw the reins plumb away—and snappin' this way and that, anticipatin' every move the steer could make. Turnin' on his hind feet and always toward the steer, runnin' at the steer's side and settin' up, and turnin' on a dime when the steer tries to dodge in under his tail, and blockin' that onery old ox till he gets plum disgusted with tryin' and, rollin' his tail over his back, trots off to the cut as though that was the only place in the world he wanted to go.

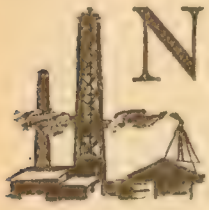
That's what a cow-horse is, and he's far from a common article of commerce. Probably some cowboy will try to steal him some day, but it's mighty unlikely he'll ever be offered for sale. Them kind of horses is sort of men like that's big enough to be presidential timber—they are pretty tolerable rare!

SINGED MOTHS

By JAMES P. OLSEN

Author of "The Last Laugh," etc.

Tom Saylor's job was putting out blazing oil-wells—and the hotter they burned the better he liked it. And though there are fires and fires, Tom had an idea that his method would quench them all—permanently!



NO LIFE-INSURANCE salesman had ever tried to get Tom Saylor's name on the dotted line—as a risk, Tom would have been worse than a total loss. Not that Tom figured it that way. He didn't.

Like an artist's conception of some strange figure from another planet, Tom, clad in a suit of asbestos, ran toward the oil, gas, and fire-vomiting crater that marked the location of the Kellam Oil Company's No. 1 Olney. A giant torch, consuming more than fifty million feet of gas and a thousand barrels of oil daily, the burning well had resisted even the efforts of fire-fighting crews who had attempted to snuff it out with steam.

Such a state of affairs cost the company dearly, so they sent for Tom Saylor. Now, three hours after he had landed his plane a couple of miles from the burning gusher, Tom was getting into action. Straight into the outer edge of the flames he ran. The heat seemed to bake him through his asbestos suit and helmet. The asbestos shoes on his feet seemed big chunks of fire.

He swung the end of his light wire line around a set of red-hot steel bull-wheels, ran back and raised his arms. A quarter of a mile away—as close to the fire as human beings could get—the drum on a big tractor began to revolve slowly. The glowing metal

wheels were pulled back from the well and again Tom, wire line in hand, ran back to the flames.

Thirty minutes later the last of the hot rig irons had been pulled back away from the hole. The danger of the well becoming ignited again from this iron, after once being extinguished—had been removed.

Working carefully, Tom set two steel posts about a hundred yards apart, one on each side of the burning well. With a jack, he stretched a heavy wire between these posts so that the thin line, on which so much depended, was right in the outer edge of the column of flame.

His ears roaring, his skin reddened and cooked, Tom carried a number of ten-quart, galvanized cans up to one of the posts. As he picked them up and carried them into the heat area, the men working at the tractor moved back still farther. For in each can was enough destruction to have wrecked the biggest skyscraper, if properly set—nitro glycerine!

Quickly, almost carelessly it seemed to those who watched him from afar, he hung a shell on a little trolley wheel that was attached to the wire. The shell, like a piece of bright tin stovepipe, closed like the point on a skyrocket on the bottom, swayed on the wire as he poured the nitro glycerine into it. Can after can went into the making of a shot that would have blown a regiment to atoms.

Dizzy with the heat, he set the clock on a little time bomb so it would go off about thirty seconds after he started it on its way.

The watching men held their breaths as they saw him give the shell a gentle shove that sent it down the line toward the flame. If the bomb went off too soon—well, there would be no need of a funeral for Tom Saylor. There would be nothing to bury.

Running like a fiend, despite the handicap of his cumbersome outfit, Tom dived to the ground and placed his face close to the earth, two hundred yards from the fire. He was none too soon. There was a deafening roar, and a pressure like a giant hand seemed to squeeze him to the ground. Sound ceased. He was lying momentarily in a vacuum from which all the air had been forced by the explosion.

Tom staggered to his feet. Men were running toward him, shouting and waving their arms. He looked toward the well. The column of flame had been snuffed out. White and blue heat-vapor rose from the hole around the oil and gas that gushed from the ground.

Once again Tom Saylor, the man for whom the insurance companies had no use, had triumphed.

LOLLED back in his swivel chair in his office in the Equity Building, Tom was at peace with the world. Three dangerous fires within a month had served to satisfy, for the time being, even Tom's appetite for danger.

His feet hit the floor with a bang and his half-smoked cigar was gripped tightly in clenched teeth. For, just down the hall in another office, a woman had screamed. Tom listened. Frightened, piercing, it came again. Tom jerked open his own door and ran down the hall.

The sign, *Lobo Petroleum Corporation* on the door down the hall disappeared as Tom kicked out the glass. Inside, bent back over a desk, a disheveled girl was struggling with an insolently leering man.

Tom grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him around. His right fist connected with the fellow's jaw and his left buried in his stomach. Without a second glance at the victim of his knockout wallops, Tom pushed the frightened girl through a door into another office and turned back to the man on the floor.

He moved, opened his eyes, and groaning curses, staggered to his feet. He eyed Tom, malevolently as he fingered his swollen jaw.

"Damn you!" His right hand stole toward the desk drawer behind him. "Didn't you ever hear of people getting in trouble by butting in where they had no business?"

"Uh-huh," Tom grinned. "Did you ever hear that women are respected in this neck of the woods—even if they do happen to be people's stenographers?"

The man's hand was slipping into the drawer. He talked on, sparring for time. "You'll learn you can't poke your nose in—say, know who I am?"

"I do." Tom was lighting a fresh cigar. "According to information—which I have reason to believe is correct—you are none other than R. Bernard Volk, grand mogul of the Lobo Company, the dirtiest, lease-grabbingest crookedest outfit in the oil-fields today!"

Volk's hand whipped from the drawer. But Tom had been watching for the move. Again his fist snapped home to the pit of Volk's stomach. The oil promoter bent double. Tom planted a hard rabbit-punch on the back of his neck, that sent him to the floor, crying aloud in agony. The gun fell from his nerveless fingers.

"You may be a red-hot number when it comes to engineering crooked deals," Tom turned to the wrecked door, "but you don't burn a bit bright with me. Fact is, my job's putting out fires—a damned sight more hot than you'll ever be!"

Had he seen the look on Volk's face when he turned back to his own office, Tom might have given it a second thought. There was fire in Volk's look, true enough. But it was different than any Tom had ever stacked himself against before.

A WORN, harassed look on his face, Grant Morgan spread a map on the desk before Tom. His hand shaking, he pointed to a black spot on the map, a spot that was shown in the rough country over the Mexican border.

"You see," he explained, "when I got that lease from the Mexican Government, they tacked on a lot of provisions and clauses. One of them was that I would have to produce my well within a year—if I hit oil or gas. Failing, I was to turn it over to them.

"Well, we got a big well there—but our time is up in twenty days. And someone set our well on fire!"

"What would be the idea—some of the government men do it?" Tom was studying the map closely.

"No. Right after I leased it, some other company—ever hear of the Lobo Corporation? that was it—took a second lease on it, in case I failed to deliver. I think they had an idea we were on an oil producing structure. I've an idea they might tell us something about that fire—those Lobo men."

"Yes. I have an idea, too, that they might. I've had a run-in with Volk myself, just a few days ago.

"But," Tom went on, "I see no need of your being worried. I can fly down there and put the fire out in a day. That will give you over two weeks to build another derrick and put your well to producing."

"You could," Morgan sighed deeply, "if we could get glycerine in there for you to shoot it out with. But we can't. The Northern Torpedo Company started a load in there for us. The whole thing blew up—we never even found a piece of the shooter or his car!" Morgan shuddered.

"Um-humm!" Tom's eyes narrowed. "A rifle shot through a load of nitro and you usually don't find much to weep over. That's one thing about that sort of life. You don't have but *one* accident!"

He opened a closet and set out a dozen ten-quart cans, the sort used as nitro glycerine stock cans. Only, on each can was painted *Castor Oil.*

"I've had to fly with nitro-glycerine before," Tom told Morgan. "So I've always got a bunch of cans handy. If the airport and airways men knew what I was carrying, they would run me out of the air for good. Foolish, of course. I never take off from or land at an airport when I'm carrying the stuff. And if it ever blows up in the air——" Tom shrugged and laughed.

"But, lay off the worrying. I've put out bigger fires than that. Starting right now, I'm leaving. Yoicks, and away!"

Morton wrung Tom's hand, choking back the thanks he knew were not needed and not wanted.

FLYING at three thousand feet, Tom circled the broken wastes around Morton's burning well. A mile from the well, he picked out what seemed to be the only level place within fifty miles, and nosed gently down.

He gritted his teeth as the plane bounced over a rough spot, breathed a little prayer and gunned up the motor. He was rolling toward a deep gully and barely picked up air-speed enough to clear it and climb free, the stick pulled back to his stomach.

He circled again, and with the Grim Reaper as mascot over the hundred quarts of nitro-glycerine he carried, sat the plane down on her tail. The skid plowed sand and the ship bumped and lurched sickeningly as the wheels hit the ground. She rolled a few yards and stopped.

"That," Tom told Morton, who came running up, "was one thrill I won't forget. Now, bring on your well."

"You have to go to it," Morton joked, the tension of weeks of worry over his well somewhat relieved. A group of frightened peons and the drilling crews of the well came up and started carrying the nitro toward the fire.

Tom and Morton, each carrying two ten-quart cans, stopped about a quarter of a mile from the flaming gusher. More gas than oil-fire, the column of flame shot over a hundred feet into the air. The ground around the well was covered with dead ducks and geese that had flown into the blinding stream of death at night.

Tom turned to Morton. "Thank heaven you used wooden bull-wheels and equipment. Won't take us but a little while to pull the rest of the scrap out of there," he motioned toward the fire.

One of the Mexicans set a big suitcase down and Tom opened it, taking out the things he would need. He slipped on his thick asbestos coveralls and tucked the bottoms of them into heavy-soled, asbestos boots. Putting on a gas mask, he slipped an asbestos helmet over that, his eyes, only, being visible through the window in the helmet. Morton helped him put on the elbow-length asbestos gloves.

"Golly!" Morton shouted at the top of his voice, "you look like you were going to a formal shindig in hell! Asbestos full dress with all the trimmings."

Tom waved one clumsy looking hand at him, picked up one end of the soft-laid wire line that was coiled at his feet, and walked slowly and steadily toward the well.

It was the work of but a few minutes to hook his line on to the glowing irons around the flaming pillar. He waved his hands and Morton signaled to the driver of a truck, who pulled away, dragging the heated metal with him.

"Worse than I thought," Tom gasped, as he returned to the others, stripped off his headgear, and sat down on the ground. "Must be high-gravity oil going up in that mess."

"It is," Morton told him.

"It'll take everything I've got to shoot her out," announced Tom, as he rubbed salve on his blistered face. Then, pulling on a new pair of asbestos shoes and gloves, he went back to the well and started setting his posts and his trolley line set up.

Muffled in his asbestos helmet, and unable to hear above the roar of the burning well, Tom did not notice the swift-flying plane that appeared from the heights, and winged low above him. The rest of the men, warned by the roar of the plane's motor, had looked up just in time. A stream of lead from a sub-machine-gun bit sand at their feet, running them to the scant shelter of the mesquite and rocks.

Tom felt something tear at the leg of his coveralls. He threw back his head and peered up through the window in his helmet. One glance at the plane was enough. It needed not the singing lead to send him for shelter with the rest.

"Somebody hates like hell to see that fire put out," grunted Tom, inspecting the bullet

hole in his suit. Morton looked up at the plane, which was circling slowly, two thousand feet up.

"Yes—it looks that way," he agreed bitterly. "It's no use, I guess. When a gang of crooks sets out to hotfoot a man, he might as well give it up."

"Why not wait until night?" one of the drilling crew suggested.

"Night is worse than daylight," Tom told him. "With that 'candle' lighting things up for miles around—no, it can't be done.

"We'll take a chance and shoot it out today—maybe!" And with that he picked up two cans of his "soup" and started toward the post where he had already hung his shell on the trolley line.

For two hours it was a battle between Tom, carrying death at each step, and the plane. Tom would run out and set his nitro down, turn and run back to the brush. The plane would circle and dive and rain lead around him. Morton and three of the drilling crew had gotten rifles from the bunkhouse and held the plane off as much as they could.

"Don't worry about me," Tom told Morton. "If they hit these cans I won't be able to use sympathy. If they don't hit them, we'll hit that fire a lick that will cause it to be some put out!" Again Tom laughed as he joked about the tremendous power he handled as though it were so much water. As he turned back to the fire, Morton looked at the broad back, covered with asbestos, and shook his head.

"Lord," he breathed. "What a man!"

The roar of the plane's motor broke in above the roar of the fire. Morton turned to fight off, as best he could, the danger that threatened from above.

BETWEEN the ticklish job of pouring the nitro into the shell and dodging the bursts of lead from the diving plane, Tom had another very lively half-hour. A bullet hit one of the empty cans, which Tom had carried back a hundred yards. It exploded with a loud report, but Fate was with Tom. The jar did not set off the loaded shell.

The end of a matchstick, dampened with nitro-glycerine and rubbed on an anvil, will knock a hammer from a man's hand when he hits it. The nitro sticking to the sides of the cans after they have been emptied would blow a man to pieces. The plane dived again and bullets plowed up sand around other empty cans. Tom hurriedly moved them back still farther.

Setting the time bomb, Tom gritted his teeth and stood his ground when the plane dived again. The bullets missed him by feet. It came to him that the gunner in the plane was not firing at him. And he was right.

Blowing up the empty stock-can had set the man in the plane to shooting at the loaded shell on the trolley line. He missed

it by inches, zoomed, banked around and started diving in again, this time much lower—hardly two hundred feet up.

Tom snapped the spring release on the clock in the bomb and shoved the shell toward the flames. It picked up speed as it rode down the incline of the slack in the wire line.

Forgetting the plane, Tom bent every effort toward getting back from the burning well. He had sighted a mark about two hundred yards away where he would throw himself down.

A hundred feet from the spot he had selected, Tom was picked up and slammed to the ground with a force that caused his nose to bleed violently He guessed what was wrong: the shell had exploded too quickly.

It had. The shell, hanging in the clear on the line, had made a perfect target for the plane. A well-placed burst of bullets had hit it just before it reached the flames. But it was too late. The force of the blast snuffed out the fire—and that was not all!

Tom tore his helmet off and turned toward the well. Just as he turned, a crippled, wingless plane smashed to the ground a hundred yards away. The force of the blast, which had a crushing force for at least four hundred yards in every direction, especially upward, had caught the ship, stripping it of wings and controls.

Like a giant moth and a giant candle—the moth had been singed unto death.

"I KNOW him," Morgan stared down at the body they had pulled from the plane. "Was a flyer for the revolutionists. Barely escaped with his life."

In the front cockpit they found Volk, the sub-machine-gun still clutched in dead hands. Thinking of the shooter for the glycerine company that Volk had caused to be killed, Tom could not feel sorry for the man.

"He claimed to be a fiery sort of a fellow," Tom told Morgan, as the Mexicans laid blankets over the two bodies. "And I guess he was. But nitro-glycerine puts out fires—and, using a very appropriate but threadbare expression, how!"

GREAT OPEN SPACES

THE vast, open and treeless spaces of the West are of two sorts; desert areas, where no trees would grow anyway, and areas where trees could grow, and do, whenever they get a start. A great deal of the original prairie country belongs in the latter class, and will support almost any kind of a tree, if there is only a seed for the tree to sprout from. It is likely that centuries of grass fires, sweeping unchecked over the great plains country year after year, either made the prairie treeless and kept it so, or prevented it from becoming woodland in the first place. In either case, it all must have happened thousands of years before the Indians came. In the mountains, where there were natural barriers to break the force of the wind and the momentum of fires, the timber seemed to be able to hold its own. But on the plains the trees lost out in the struggle.

And between these two extremes, there are areas where timber will just hold its own in its struggle with fire, and no more. If a number of years go by without a fire, the young trees begin to get a start. But one fire will destroy all that has been gained. In a state of nature, with no men to interfere, areas of this kind became neither prairie nor timbered, but remained midway between the two extremes. This, perhaps, was the "forest primeval" of the mountains before civilized man came to meddle with nature, much more often than is commonly believed.

Even the ideal stands of perfect timber that were supposed to exist before the white man came, must have been mown down every hundred years or so, in a dry year with too much lightning. Because of the inevitable lightning fires, an ideal condition of unbroken forest probably never existed, and can be brought about only by improving on nature.—J. H. H.

THE SUN GOD'S EYES

By EDWIN GLENN HUDDLESTON

Far up in the Napo jungles sat the Sun God, blinded. And all through the headwaters of the Amazon the ominous throb of the Tockinoon drums betokened a dread pursuit of the missing eyes—eyes that were priceless opals

IN THE Upper-Amazon rubber forests you ain't supposed to ask a man why the name he bears don't correspond with the initials on his arm. Fact is, you ain't supposed to ask a man anything there. Another fact is, you ain't got no business in the Upper-Amazon rubber forests; it's a steaming hell-hole—not exactly the jumping off place, but the place you hit after you've jumped!

Me? Why do I stay? Because if I went back outside I doubt if anybody'd know me—and you couldn't much blame 'em. You see, a wounded jaguar thought I had the skin you love to touch, so he made a swipe at my face. You'd hardly call it a face now; but you don't specially need a face here. All you need is two legs and two arms, an eye or two, and a head. But of course now, sometimes a man lets an arm get separated from his clavicle, or a leg from his hip, or—his head from his neck.

Funny thing, that.

Mr. Kay, for instance—at least, that's what he said his name was.

One night when we was all swigging *maté* in the *barracas,* Kay come in—from nowhere in particular. A glance at him told that he'd been in the tropics a long while, but we didn't ask where, nor why.

He was stockily built, mahogany-hided—you couldn't call it skin; it was thick as

a rhino's. But he had the voice and eyes of a white man, although his unfaltering gray eyes never disclosed just *what kind* of white man. I'm still wondering——

He'd a big Chinese parrot on his shoulder and a heavily-bradded leather contraption encircling his waist and vitals. Aside from that and his moroccan hip boots, he was naked. He didn't have no 'nitials tatooed on his arms to mess him up, either. Instead, on his right forearm he had a naked yellow woman who wriggled her hips when he quirked his muscles.

Mr. Kay made the yellow woman do the hula while we got acquainted. And when there's to be no questions asked it's a damned funny acquaintance. He'd like to stay at our *seringal* a little while, he said, and then he was going away. Nowhere in particular—up the Maranon, or down the Amazon, or out the Orinoco—just going away. Meanwhile, he'd like a job—gathering rubber! A white man!

But he got the job, and he held it well. Never saw a white man work harder in the tropics than Mr. Kay did. I began to wonder if he was a white man at all—or god or devil.

WHEN he chose to, Kay could make the most perfectly rounded rubber *bollos* it's ever been my lot to see. He was proud of his *bollos* too, and he lugged one of the heavy things in one night for the boys to see. He'd embedded his initials in it with custard-apple seeds.

Everyone understood that simple, futile vanity.

I ran my fingers questioningly over the seeded letters, *M. K.*

"Mr. Kay," he grinned, and started the yellow woman a-jazzing on his arm. "By the way," he added, "ain't your brokers Laitz & Laitz at Manaos?"

I was startled that he should know, but I nodded, surmising that he'd seen the stack of *bollos* at the wharf awaiting the down-river boat.

The Chinese parrot remarked, "Hell, it's hot!" in a high, raucous voice and began fidgeting on its perch.

"Why, it ain't hot!" Cord broke out. "What's that bird so jumpy about?"

I noticed Kay was sharing the parrot's uneasiness. The man was shifting nervously on his stool, and our hut—a bamboo cage perched high above the quagmire on *hevea* stilts—contributed to the general agitation by beginning to sway in a cool rising wind.

Cord strode to the door of the hut; when he turned to us again his face was pasty beneath his tan.

"God!" he cried, "don't you hear it? The tom-toms—over there to the east—they give me the creeps—like a sick man gruntin'! I thought the Tockinoons was a peaceful people. Wonder what's riled 'em?"

"Guess something's gone wrong with the sun god," Smith told him, "and they're trying to appease the bounder! He's s'posed to hold off the rainy season, but it looks like he's 'bout to fizzle on 'em this time! This wind says rain—rain, fever and death——" He broke off in a hollow laugh.

A voice was calling from the darkness.

Cord returned to the hut's doorway, stood listening attentively while a native yammered up at him from below.

"No," Cord said at last, gesturing wildly, "he ain't here! Never heard of him!"

Cord faced us quizzically then, but he asked no question. His eyes sparkled at Kay.

"He says somebody's blinded the sun god and it's goin' to rain—oh, it's goin' to rain like hell! Somebody's stolen the sun god's eyes—and they're lookin' for the Man of the Dancing Woman!"

Mr. Kay hunched forward on his stool. "Ain't it funny something always happens to back up these natives' beliefs in their crazy religions? Ain't it a hellish coincidence that, of all the years for an early rainy season, it had to come just when the sun god got his eyes stolen?"

"Rats!" grunted Cord. But he was worried.

Fact is, we were all worried. The rain

come on next morning in thick waving curtains. The tom-toms kept a-grunting, steady, rhythmic, louder, nearer—and it nearly made you sick. You had to keep your mind off yourself or you'd go mad. Some of the boys played cards—with celluloid decks that didn't wear out. Kay went down and got a little lumpy *bollos,* and made it round and smooth to kill time. He put his 'nitials on it too, poor jackass, and left it on the stack for the down-river boat—to advertise the workmanship of an unknown man of the hinterland.

Night brought the tom-toms nearer. They was grunting, thumping, madder—louder!

Still Mr. Kay kept his silence. But we knew—at least, we believed—that this was the man who'd stolen the sun god's eyes. Not that we cared—no; let him steal 'em; he was a good messmate and bunkmate and a real pally sort—except for his silence.

Our suspicions were confirmed that night. I was setting near the door when the woven rattan flooring started quivering beneath me. I knew some one was on the ladder, climbing up.

A MOMENT later a sinewy Tockinoon squatted in the opening. We observed with alarm that he wore the bloodchain — a length of red beads draped through the lobe of his nose and caught in the lobes of his ears.

"I seek," he said in the vernacular, "the Man of the Dancing Woman."

"I told you once," shouted Cord angrily, "that he ain't here! What kind of eyes did the sun god have, anyway?"

"Eyes of Cotopaxi opals, O lying son of a white-bellied snake! I *see* the Man of the Dancing Woman!" The man's hand darted to his gee-string. The knife he drew was long, gleaming. He tossed, and the knife cut a gleaming circle of light across the room. Kay lurched aside; the blade struck the wall where his chest had been, sank quivering into the rattan latticework. There the hilt held it, preventing its penetrating the wall.

There was a screech of rage as the man saw he had missed his aim. He dashed madly across the room to retrieve the weapon.

Kay intercepted him, extended a booted foot. The native tripped headlong to the floor; the hut quaked violently at the impact.

Terror leapt into the Tockinoon's eyes as he saw Kay grasp the knife's handle, wrench it from the wall. He bounced up, plunged for the door, but not before the knife, flung from Kay's mahogany hand, had whizzed across the room and implanted itself in the native's claret-colored shoulder.

There was a howl of pain as the man dropped from the doorway, and a plop in the mud as he struck the marsh below.

We heard him crashing away through the underbrush. Shortly, as the drum-beats grew more furious, we surmised that he had joined his fellows; but although we lay awake all night, there was an open attack.

A gray daylight showed that the Amazon was out of her banks—and she's a stream that ain't particular where her banks should be. The jungle floor was flooded; a yellow sea swirled beneath the staples of our hut. None of the wharf was to be seen; the rubber *bollos* which had been stacked upon it awaiting shipment had been swept away. Kay sighed for the loss of his last perfectly rounded *bollos;* Cord cursed at the ceaseless grunting of the tom-toms.

"My God, where are they? If they're on the ground why ain't they been washed away? My God, that damned thumpin's gonna drive me mad!"

"Must be in anchored dug-outs in the shallows," Smith put in. "Murki's always said that the Tockinoons' sun god's a big idol up in the jungles of the Napo. It'd take boats, you know, to get down this far. But if somebody's stole the old boy's opal eyes he's stole a hell of a lot of mazuma! Wish I'd stole 'em myself!"

"You're crazy!" Kay countered. "How'd you get away before they'd catch you? And when they catch you they're supposed to swab out the old boy's eyeless sockets with the blood of the thief before they put in new peepers—always opals though, prime opals! Oh, boy! But it's been done before—this eyeball stealin' business, and the thief always gets caught!"

A SILENCE fell, a silence broken only by sudden muffled blows beneath us that could be nothing but the measured rise and fall of machetes, sinking into the *hevea* stilts of our hut.

We faced each other aghast.

"Why—why, they're choppin' us down," Smith gasped.

"Get a gun!" shouted Cord.

Kay protested. "No you don't! Don't make 'em any madder by shootin' at 'em! They'd just lay low till they starved you out—but they won't do that." Kay lifted the parrot to his shoulder. "I'm the only one they want—and I'm goin' to 'em! Sorry I've troubled you so, *hombres*." He turned to the doorway.

Cord stopped him. "Kay, you blitherin' jackass! What d'ya mean, tryin' this noble sacrificial stuff on us? What d'ya think we are—cannibals? Lettin' a white man give himself up to the Tocks—hell, no! You set down on your stool and stay there! When this thing falls we can fall with it, I guess, and swim for it! We're free, sun-baked, and twenty-one, ain't we? We can take care of ourselves! In the trees and water the Tocks'll have a swell time telling the Man of the Dancing Woman from anybody else!"

But before the argument ended it was more physical force than palaver that kept Kay with us. The room grew tense. Below we could hear the machetes biting into the *hevea* boles with harsh, staccato clacks. We knew that each stroke, each passing moment, meant a shortening of the time which separated us from the yellow, crocodile-infested swirl below us. Yet, in that fraught interval, there was more warmth of good fellowship than I ever expect to know again in this world.

Still, Kay was silent. That he appreciated it, his eyes told us—but his eyes told us no more.

Suddenly the hut listed, swayed. We steadied ourselves, vainly. The world seemed to careen giddily. There was a downward plunge, a splash of water, and a chorus of maniacal yells from the machete-armed Tockinoon boatmen as our cage struck the swirling muddy current.

The rain was lashing our faces, the grunt of the drums and the cries of natives filling our ears as we extricated ourselves from the rattan wreckage.

Kay's voice rose above the clamor. "Thank you, buddies! Meet you—on the red hot—ramparts of hell!"

We saw him strike out furiously for a maze of treeferns, the parrot squawking wildly as it pirouetted after him.

And it must have been the parrot that gave him away.

A shout went up from a native dug-out as it went gliding over the surface toward the Man of the Dancing Woman and his parrot. A droning rain-curtain swept down and enveloped them then, but not before I had seen, in that fleeting instant, that the Tockinoons in the dug-out wore their blood-chains!

That was the last I saw of Mr. Kay; I guess the devilment he did or didn't do is really at an end.

But I saw his Chinese parrot again.

THE following day I returned to the scene of the disaster—I don't leave, see?—and there, perched on the *hevea* staple the Tocks had chopped into, was Mr. Kay's bird, bedrabbled now, and a-squaking in the rain.

"Kay say you keel me! Kay say you keel me!" he screeched, as my friendly *seringueiro* poled the craft in nearer the perch.

I lifted the parrot down into the boat, but the crazed bird continued its weird chant, "Kay say you keel me! Kay say you keel me!"

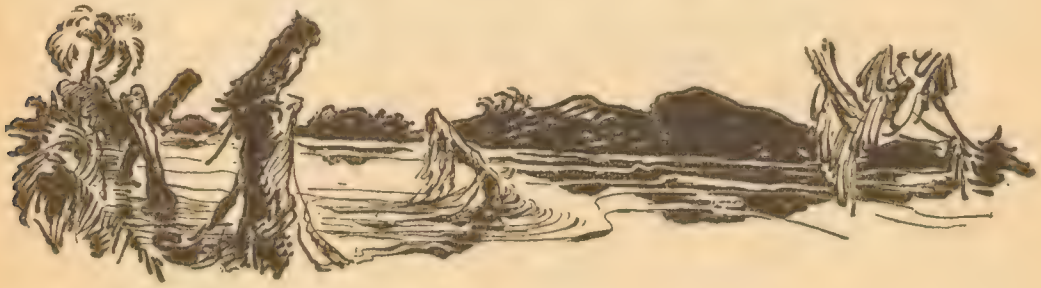
Where did the bird pick up the words? It was a new addition to his more or less lurid vocabulary. The repetition of the ghoulish statement got on my nerves—but not for long; morning found the Chinese parrot dead! Examination show that he'd died from somewhat painful indigestion; I felt a tinge of compunction that I hadn't killed him the night before—like he'd asked me to. Like he'd asked me to, indeed!

But that message had been from Kay, hadn't it? *"Kay say you keel me!"* A recently learned statement too; the bird hadn't known it a few days before! Had Kay known of the bird's impending death? But how could he have known? Not without knowing what the bird had eaten, what the bird had swallowed, now— Maybe Kay *had* known—reckon? I slit the bird with my bowie; his craw disgorged a dozen sizable opals. Compliments of Mr. Kay!

And suddenly I saw the idea of the marked, perfectly rounded *bollos*. Embedded in the heart of them may have been a king's ransom in opals for some employee of Laitz & Laitz at Manaos. I like to speculate on the scene following the finding and splitting of those *bollos,* maybe thousands of miles down the Amazon, maybe in some rubber factory in the States——

Maybe Mr. Kay'd kept the opals in his leather belt. But wherever he kept 'em, I don't care; here was a portion of 'em in the Chinese parrot's craw.

I've a big opal ring now. Set in onyx. I call it the Sun God's Eyes.



HE RISKED COLORADO RAPIDS FOR GOLD

PROBABLY one of the most daring ventures ever recorded during the gold rush to California in '49 was that undertaken by William Manley. Manley was driving a wagon in one of the overland trains, seeking California riches. When the train reached the Green River, which flows into the Colorado, someone told Manley that the Colorado flowed into the Pacific. As a matter of fact it does, but not in quite the way Manley or his informant thought.

Manley considered the river route a short cut to the gold fields. Finding an abandoned boat sunk in the sand to the gunwales, he and several others managed to launch the wreck and started on the hazardous journey down the rocky waters of the Green and later the Colorado River. Piling up in a canyon, the party undaunted, fashioned other boats out of logs and continued the trip, still lured by the wealth they thought awaited them. Eventually the voyage was abandoned when repeated warnings from Indians brought them to a realization that the venture was impossible. Manley and his party were probably the first ever to attempt the navigation of the treacherous waters; and certainly no such party of adventurers was ever so ill-equipped.

——*Harold J. Ashe*

WINGS IN THE SPANISH LEGION

By LEE ROBINSON

Author of "Forged Steel," "Conscripts," etc.

In the Spanish Foreign Legion little matters save that a man be a stark fighter and dead game to the end. What his past may have been means nothing—usually. But in the case of Jack Aldridge, one episode from bygone days came to mean the difference between life and death—not only to himself, but to his comrades as well

BREATHLESSLY, dragging their wounded with them, the handful of *legionarios* crawled through the starlit Moroccan night from the wrecked Hassi Axdar blockhouse, and the mangled corpses that had been their comrades. A complete traverse of the machine gun on the blockhouse roof, rolling back the crushing Riffian attack to its distant gullies and boulders, had made possible their unobserved escape through the dynamited wall and given them their lone chance-in-a-thousand of winning to the help that had not come to them.

Back at the blockhouse a bomb went off. Triumphant yells resounded from the encircling desert. Here and there in the darkness, the rifles of the tribesmen boomed and echoed. Suddenly, drowning them out, the cocked machine-gun atop the blockhouse roared its mechanical fury as the candle burned through the cord holding the weight off its trigger. Viciously its bullets snapped over the heads of the crawling men in a

faithful effort to open the way before them to the strong Spanish encampment at Sidi Dris.

Frantically the refugees hurried on.

At the bottom of the slope, preceded only by a crouching *legionario* with a bayoneted rifle, Jack Aldridge surged to his feet with the slim body of the wounded lieutenant on his back.

In front of him sounded an exclamation in the guttural *Tarifit* dialect of the Riffians. A shot splashed the warm darkness. *Sping!* went the ricocheting bullet past Aldridge's bowed head and over his crawling companions. Somewhere ahead there was a sound like that of a cleaver biting its way through a quarter of beef.

"Shake it up!" came a hiss from the advance guard, and Aldridge trudged on into the unknown, as the machine gun on the fort behind roared to the end of its belt.

Behind them the rifles were popping again. Forward, the boulderless plain having afforded no protection to the attackers, all was silent. For an hour they plodded on, with the fusillade growing in volume as it faded into the distance. Then came a series of dull explosions, a medley of far-off cries, and when these ceased no further sound was heard.

"They're in the blockhouse now," commented the lieutenant, as the panting refugees halted to rest and to listen for sounds of pursuit. "In a moment more they'll be on our trail!"

"You've got too much baggage, *compadres,*" said a quiet voice in their midst. "I'm ebbing, anyway; punctured past repair. Somebody kindly lend me his rifle."

"Nonsense, Norkoff," responded Aldridge heartily. "You'll get through all right. With only two wounded for us four huskies to carry, it's a cinch."

"Our American comrade is right," assented Catozzi, of Ventimiglia. "I'm willing to carry one of you all the way to Sidi Dris, Norkoff, old boy. As long as any of us are left, remember we're all musketeers!"

"Though I'm only baggage, myself," agreed the lieutenant, as he rode off on the Italian's broad shoulders, "I say that sentiment was well spoken. If we can get to that big hill called Djebel Messaua before they catch us, we can hold them off and send a heliogram to Sidi Dris for help. The Riffians can't locate us in the dark, off the trail as we are, and daylight ought to find us close enough to the hill to make for it at top speed."

Saving their precious breath, the weary *legionarios* stumbled blindly on.

THE pastel tints of dawn were streaking the sky, and the rocky cone of Djebel Messaua reared itself out of the flat desert a mile ahead, when a bullet yowled forward over the hurrying little column and a faint detonation floated up from the rear.

Back there, nothing was visible. No more than a hopeless glance they wasted. One of their first practical lessons in the Spanish Foreign Legion had been that, except in the furor of the *cuerpo à cuerpo,* the Moroccan is an adept in the art of effacing himself on the field of battle.

Another bullet soon followed the first, and the weary soldiers took up a desperate trot. Here was no place for a stand, as these veterans well knew. Such a move could only result in the loss of the hill and their only hope of salvation.

Bullets whined over them now in close succession, and ever more spiteful was their song, and ever louder the crack of the distant weapons. Looking back, Aldridge saw a flitting horseman dismount and fling himself prone on the desert, saw another far beyond leap into his saddle and gallop forward.

"Drop a man off in a minute, to cover my retreat!" he called, twining his arms in his rifle sling and lying down with his face to the rear.

Calmly he set his sight, raised his sight-leaf and dug his elbows into the sand. With the slack of his trigger taken up, and his sights aligned, he tightened his grip on the

rifle as the horseman's feet struck the ground.

Crack!

Down went the Riffian, his rifle falling from his stricken hands. His horse cantered loosely across the desert as the other rider galloped past the silent white figure and bore down upon the hurrying *legionarios*.

Over on the right, several more horsemen appeared on the misty horizon. Still Aldridge held his position, gradually pivoting around his left elbow. When the nearest rider jerked his horse to its haunches and stepped lightly to the ground, Aldridge squeezed the trigger and a red-hot fang of steel and lead bored the tribesman through the vitals.

As the Riffian crumpled, Aldridge's long legs twinkled across the smooth sand toward the hill which would mean either storm or haven. Past his kneeling comrade, Sollano, he bounded, noting that the other horsemen were Riffians and that they were rapidly approaching. In front of him Swede Jensen was snuggling himself into his favorite prone firing position, while beyond, with Norkoff on his back and his arm around the lieutenant, Catozzi was struggling through a belt of desert thorn that guarded the foot of the hill.

Some of the desert riders were dismounting in a flurry of voluminous garments. Jensen's rifle was roaring. Sollano was coming up with long strides of his thin old legs. Catozzi and his wounded had disappeared in the brown thicket. Bullets snapped overhead, whined up from the desert floor. And now a nearer Riffian horseman galloped around the side of the hill.

"Quick, Sollano!" shouted Aldridge, dropping to his knee and cuddling his cheek against his rifle stock. "Get to the top of the hill, and hold it. Jump!"

His weapon spoke as Sollano bounded past, and the Riffian came tumbling out of his saddle, his body strangely like some dancing butterfly in the hooded, fluttering, *djellaba*. Another Riffian and still another appeared behind him as his red sandals flew through the dust from his kicking bare heels.

Jensen was pumping steeljackets at the oncoming horsemen who now numbered three—now four. As Aldridge leaped past him, cramming a clip of cartridges into his rifle, he saw Catozzi dragging his wounded up the hillside with Sollano rapidly overhauling them through the dusty thicket.

Behind a small boulder Aldridge plunged, drew a quick bead on his foremost antagonist and jerked the trigger. Quickly he fired again, saw the black-bearded horseman reel, and sprang to his feet under the horse's foaming nostrils and the yelling rider's whirring scimitar.

The American's long bayonet flashed in the dawning sun as he sidestepped the plunging hoofs. Spanish steel clashed with Berber, hilts locked, and the scimitar whistled into the thorns as Jensen darted past and knelt with flaming rifle.

A splash of red appeared on the disarmed horseman's breast, and he toppled from the saddle like a thing of wood—just as his comrades thundered up.

Rifles spat from the hands of the careering riders. Bullets ricocheted from the hard sand with unearthly shrieks. Somewhere another rifle was roaring, and Aldridge saw Catozzi firing from a depression halfway up the hill.

Through the clutching shrubbery he tore in the wake of Jensen. Far up the hillside, scrambling toward the summit, he caught a fleeting glimpse of Sollano. Then Jensen was firing from behind a boulder, and Aldridge bounded past him with a grin of triumph.

THE rattle of musketry ceased as he plunged into the depression that sheltered Catozzi and the wounded. Leveled rifles covered Jensen's dash up the slope. Out on the desert, leaving their comrades where they had fallen, the tribesmen were galloping into the hazy distance.

"How does it look, Sollano?" called Aldridge, unpacking the field heliograph from his belt as Sollano's twin-peaked cap ap-

peared against the clear sky over the summit.

Sollano's rifle barked, barked again as a startled *"caramba!"* rattled from his throat, and a moment later he was crawfishing down the hillside in a cascade of stones and sand.

"Get down!" he shrieked, in his pellmell descent. "Riffians coming up the other side—a mob of them. A battle's going on at Sidi Dris. Knock their heads off as they peep over the top."

All was rapid movement within the little hollow. When Sollano's feet struck the bottom, and his rifle steadied toward the summit, two other rifles and the lieutenant's revolver pointed motionlessly in the same direction. One rifle still covered the desert below. The sixth man, the Russian Norkoff, lay gasping his life away through a hole in his chest received a dozen hours before.

Aldridge's rifle blazed as a cowled head centered in his sights. The head sank from view as another appeared, to be greeted by a slug from Jensen's barking weapon. Along the jagged crest of the hill, outlined sharply against the turquoise sky, no more heads appeared.

"Is that all of them, Sollano?" asked the lieutenant.

"Caramba! A dozen! A hundred!" chattered the old *legionario*. "And more in sight. Listen!"

In the dead silence could be heard a dull *boom-boom*.

"Spanish artillery at Sidi Dris," went on Sollano, his gray beard wagging in excitement. "A gunboat in the bay is also firing. The camp is surrounded by Riffians. We're cut off, that's what. Cut off by battle lines. No wonder they didn't send help in answer to our rockets."

"And we have no more," stated the lieutenant calmly. "We're in rather a bad fix, unless some of the air force is at Sidi Dris. If there is a plane or so, and we can get a message through, they might help us."

"You can't use the heliograph, Lieutenant," insisted Sollano. "The summit is occupied, as you see."

"Let's have suggestions, then," invited the lieutenant. "We haven't any food, and very little water."

"But plenty of ammunition," spoke up Aldridge. "Let's hike out for Sidi Dris."

"They'd finish us in short order," averred Sollano. "We'd better stay right in this hole. You ought to have seen what I did, *compadre*. I'm telling you, I got an eyeful."

"I'll take one look, at that," answered Aldridge, pulling his cap tighter on his head and starting to rise.

"Wait a minute," cautioned the lieutenant. "Hadn't we better stay here, after all, and get a little rest? Sidi Dris isn't more than two or three hours away. The more rested we are, the quicker we can make it. In the meantime, perhaps an airplane will fly over and see us."

"I'm hungry, Lieutenant," grinned the American.

HE WAS busily reaching out and breaking off handfuls of thorny branches. These he piled carefully in the deepest part of the hole and wreathed an empty ammunition bandolier over them. Finally he got out his matchbox and set fire to the bottom twigs.

"Cold, too?" asked the lieutenant quizzically.

"Like hell, sir," grinned the perspiring American, peeling off his tunic as a narrow column of black smoke grew slowly toward the glaring sky. "I'm going to send a message. How's for somebody to hold two corners of my tunic?"

"Something I can do," welcomed the lieutenant, gingerly lifting his bandaged leg toward the fire. "Sollano, you take the first watch. The rest of you had better sleep a few winks, while you have the chance. Smoke signal, Aldridge?"

"Yes, sir. Hold the corners, so! Now. Over—off—over—off——"

Insistently his voice droned on, the tunic was whisked over the smoldering fire and away, and a series of smoke blobs, some

small and some large, mounted straight into the motionless air.

At length Aldridge kicked the fire out.

"Help. Send airplane," he grinned, putting on his tunic. "With an airplane to convoy us, we can go through to Sidi Dris like a recruit through his enlistment bonus. The American Marines used airplanes that way, over the jungles of Santo Domingo. I tried to get into their air force, before I came to the Legion, but a washout in the army flying school wasn't enough recommendation to suit the leathernecks."

In the growing heat the little band sought comfortable positions and moistened their dry lips from thinly sloshing canteens. Norkoff groaned, and the few drops of water which Catozzi tried to pour down his throat ran out the side of his mouth.

A shimmering halo radiated from the glaring white garments of the twisted figures on the nearby desert. In the edge of the brown thicket a riderless horse foraged for something incomprehensible to any but a hard-bitten desert charger.

Under their shaggy brows, Sollano's sharp old eyes squinted toward the summit. With his scarlet bandanna over Norkoff's eyes and his arm crooked over his own, the Italian snored. Whistling a lilting waltz between his teeth, Aldridge compared the Moroccan heat with that of the memorable August days when the Brooks Field "Laundry Board" ironed him out and a terse telegram summoned him to a still hotter session on the edge of the Mojave Desert with his long-suffering father.

The sudden crack of Sollano's rifle brought all hands alert, fingers on triggers. Still watching the summit, the old *legionario's* face crinkled in delight.

"Right in the eye!" he chuckled. "That's the place to pot a Morucho!"

"Good work, Sollano," commended the lieutenant. "But I'm afraid our airplane hope was a dud, Aldridge. They could have been here long ago."

"Maybe they didn't see our signal," suggested the American, heaping his faggots and rags together, lighting them and getting out of his tunic again. "All right, Lieutenant, let's try it again. Over—off—over——"

A sharp cry from Sollano halted them in the middle of the message. A rusty sardine can, tightly wrapped with rags, caromed off the hillside into their midst, scattered the fire and plunked against the trembling body of Norkoff.

IN UTTER disregard of the sudden storm of bullets over their heads from above, everybody in the hole lunged for the can. Too well they knew what was in that bit of apparent refuse.

With a supreme effort, Norkoff raised himself to a sitting posture, seized the can in both hands and rolled over upon it. The next instant there was a sickening explosion under him, and with a sigh he stretched out on his face, his hands clawing for a moment at the hot sand.

Five living men emulated him under that plunging sleet of lead. A lone Mauser answered as Catozzi worked his bolt furiously from behind the boulder where he had slumbered a minute before. One by one, his comrades took up the fire as they worked to vantage points. Gradually the enemy's fire died out, and the cowled heads ceased their bobbing over the dazzling summit.

"Another name engraved in the Book of Gold," murmured the lieutenant softly. "Norkoff's gone west."

"What do you say, fellows?" breathed Aldridge, wriggling into his tunic and belts. "Who wants to take the hill?"

"I," responded Catozzi, and the word was instantly echoed by Spaniard and Swede.

There was a fluttering sound in the air, a rattling thump in the nearby brush, and five heads went down as if pulled by a string.

Crash! Sand, thorns and fragments of tin whistled overhead. Aldridge sprang to his lean height.

"Come on, gang!" he snapped.

Up the rocky slope he sprinted, the rat-

tle of his comrades' hobnails behind him. Through the clatter came a sharp cry from the lieutenant.

"Listen!"

Three tattered figures flattened on the steep hillside. Three pairs of eyes glued themselves to the summit. Three sweaty forefingers tightened on slippery triggers. In the hush that followed could be heard the dull roar of an explosion beyond the hill, the distant crackle of musketry and a steadily rising drone.

"Hooray!" yelled Aldridge, digging toward the summit with his companions in hot pursuit.

From almost overhead came the unmistakable rumble of an airplane's motor, and as Aldridge lunged over the summit he saw a bomb explode near a running tribesman whose *djellaba* stuck out behind him like a dirty tablecloth.

The Riffians were decamping, horse and foot, while over them swooped a low-hung amphibian biplane with the insignia of the Spanish Navy beside the bomb-racks on its lower wings.

Around the hill swerved the machine, its pilot waving his hand and the *legionarios* waving back. Out over the desert it swooped, its machine gun spraying death among the scuttling tribesmen. When the last fluttering *djellaba* was far beyond effective rifle range, the machine turned, settled lightly to the ground and waddled toward the hill like an overgrown penguin.

"WONDER where the observer is?" exclaimed Aldridge, his eyes on the glittering machine gun over the empty rear cockpit.

"How many men have you?" called the pilot, as the machine came to a purring halt.

"Six," answered the lieutenant, hopping and sliding down the thorny slope.

"Two at a time, then," rejoined the pilot. "It won't take many minutes. I left my observer, in expectation of possible passengers. Your call was relayed to us by radio, as we rounded Cape Quilate. We saw your next signal, broken off in the middle, and I took off by catapult while under way. I'm from the *Picador de Asturias*."

"Go ahead, two of you," said Aldridge. "Carry Norkoff to the plane, and make the lieutenant go with him on the first trip. Two of us will watch from here, while they take off."

Jensen and Catozzi scrambled down the slope and picked up the dead Russian.

"I'll wait for the last trip, fellows," called the lieutenant, at which a protesting chorus broke from his men. The naval aviator apparently adding his protest, the lieutenant was lifted in beside the Russian's body and gave Jensen his cigarettes. Jensen and the Italian turned the amphibian around, and it immediately scooted across the flat sand, climbed into the air and swerved over the hill toward the coast.

"Simple, isn't it?" remarked Aldridge, as the four *legionarios* sat atop the hill and lighted cigarettes while they watched the airplane dwindle out of sight toward the sparkling Mediterranean.

"Great stuff!" averred Jensen. "Ten years ago, we wouldn't have had a chance. Airplanes are wonderful things."

"They are that," agreed Aldridge, taking off his cap and running his fingers through his perspiring hair. "I'm going to make another start in that game, myself, when I get out of the Legion. I didn't see much hope a few minutes ago, though."

"Neither did I," admitted the Italian. "But now we sit comfortably waiting, and when the airplane gets back we'll just step aboard and soar to our breakfast like millionaries. I could use some breakfast, what I mean! My stomach is flapping like an empty wine-bag. You two blondies need a haircut, too, the same as myself."

"I'm going to get one, if I ever run across another barber," replied Aldridge, holding up his joined palms with four twigs protruding. "The two short sticks remain for the last trip. The two long ones pile into the airplane as soon as it stops. Draw your tickets, gentlemen."

Sheepishly they drew, and Jensen and

Catozzi held tickets for the last trip.

"We'll leave you all our guns and ammunition," said Aldridge, shaking the last drop of brackish water from his canteen into his mouth. "In case the Riffians come again—*sangre de Cristo!* Look!"

Across the shimmering desert scores of tiny horsemen were converging toward Djebel Messaua. Unable to do a thing except watch, realizing that they occupied the safest position that could be found, the *legionarios* silently waited. Soon they could plainly see the fluttering garments and glittering weapons of the tribal warriors.

As they came within range, the Riffians changed their course diagonally. Rapidly they came on, offering an impossible target as they spurred this way and that in their circular approach. And now the *legionarios* lay down upon their faces and cuddled their sweating Mausers.

"There she comes!" shouted Aldridge, as the first wild shots whined off the hillside and the returning airplane appeared high in the air behind the galloping horsemen.

STRAIGHT for its prey the machine dived, its wires screaming and its motor picking up with a mighty roar as it neared the ground. With a wing tip almost brushing the flat desert at moments, with its machine-gun drumming sporadically and a lengthening trail of kicking men and horses in its curved wake, it swept around the hill in a storm of bullets from the tribesmen's rifles.

The watching *legionarios* gasped as a feather of dust followed the trailing wing tip. Suddenly the machine righted, swept the ground with its wheels, roared off toward Sidi Dris and sideslipped sickeningly through a vertical bank. In the nick of time, it leveled off over the charging Riffians and fluttered uncertainly earthward.

Roughly it struck the ground, bouncing from one wheel and alighting on the other and a wing-skid. Drunkenly it thumped back and careened to the opposite wheel. Lurching from side to side, it waddled forward with rapidly diminishing speed.

Risking a broken neck, Aldridge was charging down the slope. Through the spiny thicket he plunged, his trousers flying in tatters, his legs smarting, and the crash of stones and brush told him that his comrades were with him.

Madly they raced toward the machine as it stopped with idling motor. As madly, a score of yelling tribesmen beyond spurred their horses forward. A bearded Riffian sprang from his saddle to one of the wings. After him in a steel-tipped dive went Aldridge, while his companions met the enemy in furious, clashing battle.

Pushing rifle, bayonet and transfixed Riffian from the wing, Aldridge leaped for the rear cockpit. Lying across the gun mount, he whirled the machine-gun around and pressed the trigger as it covered the howling tribesmen.

Like snow before a blowtorch, the charge melted. A few survivors whirled away, to be brought down after Aldridge had crawled into the cockpit and snuggled the gun in earnest. When he turned, his companions were lifting the pilot from his seat and laying him in the black shadow of a wing.

"Looks like the last roll, for him," breathed Jensen, kneeling over the limp figure. "He's got a slug right through the middle of his chest."

"A moment ago," murmured Catozzi, "we were talking about how simple it was."

"Strap him in, back there," ordered Aldridge, climbing into the front cockpit. "Here's where I use some of my education. Who wants to go along?"

"Are you an aviator?" marveled Catozzi.

"Not quite," answered Aldridge, "but I can run it away from *here!*"

"Let Sollano go," suggested the Italian. "He has a family."

"Perhaps he'd better stay, then," said Aldridge dryly, as the now groaning pilot was lifted in. "Who wants to take a long chance?"

"I'll go," said Jensen, climbing in.

"I'll probably bump us both off," warned Aldridge.

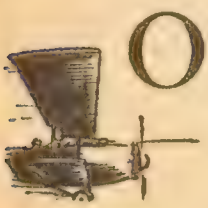
"Small difference," retorted the imperturbable Swede.

"All right," said Aldridge. "Got a pencil and paper, anybody?"

"Here's a pencil," answered Jensen, "and I can use the empty cigarette package for paper."

"Fine!" called Aldridge, experimenting with the controls, his confidence rising. "Write on it, *'Two starving* legionarios *at bay on Djebel Messaua.'* Put it in your tunic pocket, and throw the tunic overside if we can get above any Spanish troops. Here, you fellows! Take our guns and ammunition, and hold out to the last button. We'll get help to you, if we don't crash. Up the hill you go! Ready, Jensen?"

"All ready," answered the Swede promptly, and Aldridge opened the throttle.



OUT over the blinding desert sped the amphibian, gathering speed rapidly. Recalling snatches of what he had learned at Brooks Field, Texas, before the renowned "Laundry Board" had washed him out, Aldridge eased the stick forward and crowed in delight as the tug of the tailskid disappeared and the shimmering horizon rose over the motor cowling.

Doubting the landing but not the takeoff, he pulled back unflinchingly on the stick, and the amphibian climbed off the sand and roared obediently toward the dazzling sun.

Gingerly he manipulated the controls, his mind groping back through the obliterating months for the scarcely grasped principles of flying. Gradually, while he risked a glance at the two forlorn *legionarios* arriving at the top of Djebel Messaua with their armloads of weapons, the horizon swung around until the blue Mediterranean was straight ahead.

Swiftly it came nearer. Almost underneath, it seemed, the beach was dotted with the regular lines of tents at Sidi Dris. The height of Talilit swarmed with men, bristled with guns. In the foreground, with shells breaking over their heads, the low ridges were fringed with countless tribesmen. Offshore a gunboat was firing rapidly, a transport was discharging troops on lighters, and a gray cruiser which was probably the *Picador de Asturias* was coming to anchor.

Over the blue water soared the amphibian, and Aldridge turned in a wide arc and shoved forward cautiously on the stick. Before his vision swirled Sidi Dris with its guns, its swarms of soldiers and its tents. Beneath him stretched the wide beach.

Prayerfully he throttled the motor and glided toward the beach. Lower and lower he settled, until he expected every moment to strike the hard sand. Finally, having waited as long as he could to avoid pancaking, he pulled the stick back slowly.

With a rattling jolt, the tailskid struck. Aldridge's teeth clapped together as the wheels followed. Bucking wildly, inexorably turning seaward on the gently sloping beach, the amphibian splashed through a foam-crested breaker, came to a stop half afloat and was immediately surrounded by a swarm of drenched soldiers who pulled it ashore.

"That's what you call an amphibian landing, isn't it?" laughed a young officer in their midst.

"Unload," responded Aldridge, and Jensen climbed out after assisting the soldiers to remove the wounded naval aviator.

"What's this, *legionario?"* demanded an artillery general, arriving with his glittering staff.

"Out of the way, up there!" shouted Aldridge, easing open the throttle in desperation lest he be ordered to dismount.

"That Legion!" he heard an exclamation, as the amphibian moved. A cheer was drowned in his ears as he shoved the throttle open and careered wildly down the beach.

Far beyond the Spanish lines, with tribesmen shooting at him and the gunboat's shells geysering sand and smoke nearby, he pulled resolutely on the stick. Over the desert climbed the powerful amphibian, roaring obediently toward the upthrust cone of Djebel Messaua.

Rapidly the hill marched toward him. Around it flitted dots which were undoubtedly Riffians. When he came closer he could see some of them lying on the desert among their slain comrades, shooting toward the hill while others advanced in wild zigzags. Atop the hill, glinting rifle barrels and pistoning right arms showed the two *legionarios* in businesslike action.

NOSING downward, Aldridge experimented with the breech of the synchronized machine-gun. Raucously he cheered as the drumming roar of gunfire suddenly joined that of the motor. Maneuvering the amphibian like a leaf in a whirlwind, and singing nothing in particular at the top of his voice, he ripped fantastic patterns of smoking tracers among the milling tribesmen.

Desperately he throttled his motor and whistled up to lose some of his terrific momentum. Far over the desert he turned, lowered the thrumming propeller in a long glide, and opened his way toward Djebel Messaua with a stream of bullets.

With a smooth mile in front of him, confident of making a perfect landing and trying to see how close he could skim the ground without touching it, he almost drove his backbone through his skull at the smashing impact. Four times he bounced, and each time something seemed to break, each time he landed nearer the ground. But the motor still thrummed without a flicker. When he waddled lopsidedly up to the hill, Sollano and Catozzi were running to meet him.

"That duck's got a broken leg!" shrieked the Italian excitedly.

"To hell with the leg!" retorted Aldridge. "What we need is wings. Turn her around, and get aboard. Look what's coming!"

With sidelong glances at the landing gear, they turned the machine and climbed breathlessly in. A wave of yelling horsemen thundered toward them. Calmly Aldridge opened the throttle, pressed the machine-gun trigger and charged straight into their midst.

A wing tip fouled one of the horsemen, and the amphibian ground looped. Dizzily Aldridge jammed on the gas, lumbered off in the new direction and shoved the stick forward. Ahead of him was another wave of howling riders, and bullets were screaming off the metal cowling over the motor.

The nearest horsemen were almost under the roaring propeller when Aldridge pulled the stick back and felt the wheels leave the ground. The next instant there was a rattling jolt, a dragging sensation below, and as he leaned back on the tugging stick the amphibian rocketed toward the white-hot sky of Morocco like a thing frightened out of its wits.

Hot dog! This was living!

He caught himself wishing the cadets and instructors at Brooks Field could see him now, muddling through an experience for which any one of them would have given his back teeth. More than all, as he straightened toward the dancing Mediterranean with victory screaming from his wings, he wished his hardrock father might see him now, and be present at his triumphant landing.

A quick glance he stole toward his passengers, and grinned at the scared look on the faces of the two desert hellions who gripped the sides of the cockpit as if they were afraid of soaring up to heaven in heavy marching order, hobnails and all.

Again, while he wondered at the strangely increased propeller torque, Sidi Dris was streaming under him. Sollano and Catozzi were yelling fit to burst their throats, and Aldridge looked back to see them pointing excitedly toward the ground.

Down there all was confusion. Everybody seemed to be running around with their hands describing circles in the air. Another backward glance revealed his passengers doing the same thing.

With the white-flecked waves dancing under him, Aldridge cut his motor and nosed downward in a long glide.

"Wheels!" he caught, in Sollano's frenzied accents.

Turning in his seat, Aldridge nodded with an assured grin toward the water. To the best of his understanding, the landing gear had probably carried away at the impact with the charging horsemen. He wondered why all airplanes were not amphibians; certainly, if he ever bought one, it would be nothing else. As it was—well, he knew no special technique about landing on water, but he could certainly never learn up there in the air!

Settling rapidly toward the sunlit bay, he watched the unloading transport appear in front of him, and lowered the tail of the amphibian with the intention of skimming into the trough of the shallow waves.

Swiftly, while he unstrapped his safety belt and noted that his terrified passengers were following his example, the transport and the crowded lighters whizzed nearer. Directly between the transport and the cruiser he laid his course, wondering vaguely why both ships were hurriedly lowering lifeboats.

Suddenly his head snapped backward, almost breaking his craning neck, as the keel of the amphibian apparently snagged something. The next instant a raging torrent of heavy green water swirled over his head, a hundred giant hands tried to tear him limb from limb, and something struck him a resounding whack on the head.

The world went out——

FOR a long time he lay in a pleasant doze. Gradually came memory of the attack on Hassi Axdar, the forced march to Djebel Messaua, the triumphant flight in the amphibian and the unexplained crash.

He stared at a strange world, a world of the dim past.

To begin with, he was covered with a spotless sheet. Narrow white walls hemmed him in. To his ears came the throb of engines, the slap and swish of water.

At sea!

Anxiously flexing his limbs, he was relieved to find that, barring a soreness in his lungs and an aching head, he was apparently intact. Weakly he climbed from the berth, discovered that he was attired in pajamas, that his head was bandaged and that he was almightily hungry. On a determined hunt for breakfast and information, he opened the door and stepped out.

Across the quarterdeck, off the starboard beam, he stared at the familiar brown heights of the Cape of Three Forks. From the port beam slanted the pristine rays of the morning sun.

Melilla bound!

"Hey, *legionario!*" called a voice, and Aldridge moved across the immaculate deck toward a group of beribboned officers and a gray-bearded civilian seated on deck chairs. A dapper young officer arose and shoved his chair behind Aldridge, who remained standing.

"Feel like taking another flight?" smiled the artillery general who had yelled at him on the beach at Sidi Dris.

"Yes, sir," grinned the American, while a medical officer felt his pulse. "But I'd like to eat, first."

"There goes your breakfast now," pointed the general. "Take it into his stateroom, steward. Er—Mr. Royos, here, wants to take your picture, *legionario,* for his paper. He's a war correspondent. Any objections?"

"No, sir."

"Good! And now tell us where on earth you learned to fly."

"I half-learned, sir, with the United States Army, at Brooks Field, Texas. I washed out there, though, and entered a civilian flying school. But my father snapped the pocketbook."

"And you snapped your fingers!"

"I did, sir."

"Father know where you are?"

"No, sir. And he doesn't care a hell of a lot."

"Oh, yes, he does," disagreed the general, as the gray-bearded war correspondent squeezed the bulb of his camera. "I'm a father, myself. I have a couple of firecrackery sons, and I know. How about it, Mr. Royos? You're going to give the boy a

good write-up, aren't you?"

"You know I am, *mi general.* I saw both his landings."

"Well, *legionario,* how would you like for Mr. Royos to send a copy of his paper containing the story to your father?"

"All right, sir," grinned Aldridge.

"What's the address?" asked Royos, producing pencil and notebook.

"Aldridge Mining Company, Salt Spring, Nevada, U. S. A. My sister can read it to him, I guess. She knows school Spanish, and he knows a little Mexican. What I can't understand, though, is how I happened to crash yesterday."

"Your landing gear was broken," chuckled the general reminiscently. "There was something tangled in it—a *djellaba,* if nothing else—and the whole thing hung pretty low and fouled a wave. The machine turned a twisting somersault. You were fished up rather unconscious, with possible internal injuries, so we brought you on to Melilla. Your passengers were unhurt, and rejoined their company at Sidi Dris."

"That's what I want to do," wailed Aldridge.

"He'll be all right, sir," said the medical officer, in answer to the general's questioning glance.

"All right, *legionario,*" laughed the general. "This ship goes back to Sidi Dris tonight with more troops, and you can remain aboard and report to your company commander upon arrival. That satisfactory?"

"Thank you, sir," said Aldridge, inching toward his stateroom as a warm odor of coffee, rolls and beefsteak emerged with the steward.

"By the way," called Royos, producing his notebook again. "Any message to go with the paper to your father? I speak and write English, and I'll fix up a good letter in your own words, if you'll give me a few pointers."

"Get a big red lumber pencil," directed Aldridge sardonically, in English, "and write in boxcar letters, across the whole page of the paper: 'Dear Dad: Does this sound like an "adenoid aviator?" Jack.' Be sure to put 'adenoid aviator' in quotation marks."

There was a roar of laughter from the group of officers as Royos explained.

"Why the quotation marks, *legionario?*" asked the general, his ample stomach shaking with mirth.

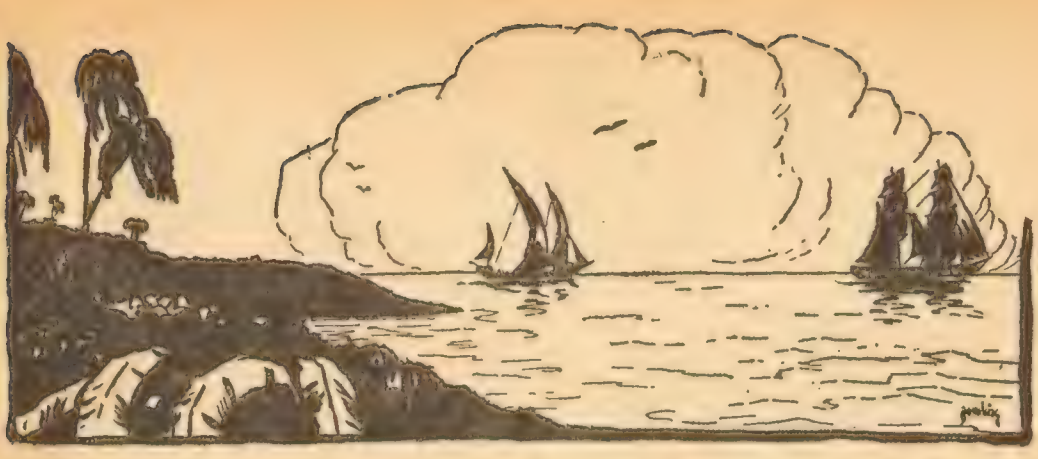
"They," grinned the American, from his stateroom door, "are to enclose the last two words the old boy spoke to me; his newest nickname for me, in fact. Say, Mr. Royos, how's to add a little postscript to that message? Something like—er—'love to you and Sis!' "

HAND GUNS

AT a recent gathering of Brand Inspectors and Peace Officers some of the old timers got to discussing the merits of six-shooters and automatics. The majority were strong for the double-action six-shooter of .38 (or larger) caliber. The single-action was acknowledged to be slower in the hands of the average man. They did not favor the automatic as an individual arm because it must be carried cocked or both hands used to fire the first shot. It cannot be fired from the hip without danger of the slide lacerating the wrist, and it must be carried in a shoulder holster for quick work. And they all agreed that quick work is of extreme importance where the first shot usually decides who wins the argument. However, for arming posses, for guards, and for military use, where the first shot just starts the argument, they felt the automatic to be the logical hand gun. And for city gangsters to use in killing unarmed people and innocent bystanders these officers think the automatic is almost as good as a sawed-off shotgun.

Now, now, neighbor, keep your shirt on! I'm not trying to start an argument, I'm just telling you what they said.

——*Carl Elmo Freeman.*



The Ends-of-the-Earth Club

HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Frontier Stories Magazine, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations. If you are interested in going places and doing things in the great outdoors, if you enjoy the comradeship of your own kind, and if you like straight talk with a good gang, you are already an Ends-of-the-Earth Club member, and ought to send in for your card.

This is a club for out-trail adventurers—for men who speak the language. Join up—now!

JOIN UP *HQ. BAT., E. E. C.*

WELL, gang, you'll all be interested in knowing that the Ends-of-the-Earth Club membership is growing by leaps and bounds. We are a pretty big crowd already, but nothing to what we'll be very soon. And that's one of the splendid things about an organization of this kind—the bigger we are the better we are. Let's be biggest and best!

If you know any hombres who have been bitten by the adventure bug—sign 'em up! This he-man adventurer's outfit is hitting the out-trail with a vengeance—and wanderlusters everywhere ought to climb on the dogsled, the battle-wagon, or *los caballos,* depending on the locality, and make it a big parade!

The membership cards are waiting—have you got yours? And has your buddy got his?

ONE of the purposes of the Ends-of-the-Earth Club is to provide an organization that will be of real service to its members. If you want to swap man-talk of adventure trails and earth's-end camps, here's a crowd of pals who speak your language. If you want information of any kind, here is a crowd that will give it to you. The Ends-of-the-Earth Club is a clearing house of trailwise information. For instance, a striking example of this is contained in the following letters, written by comrades a thousand miles apart—one asks a question, the other contains the desired information, and both letters came to the E. E. C. office in the same mail.

Comrade Owen Dailey of Des Moines, Ia., writes as follows:

The Secretary:
Certainly was pleased to hear of the formation

of the E. E. C. and would like to be enrolled as a charter member. It will be an outfit after my own heart, for, while only twenty-two years of age, I have a chronic case of wanderlust. Have done quite a bit of bumming around, although it has all been on this continent.

I wonder if any of the boys could give me any information on work at the new Boulder Dam?

With every good wish for the crowd,

Owen Dailey

Here is part of a letter from Comrade Fred Alexander, written from Las Vegas, Nevada, and stating the situation as regards work on the great engineering project:

. . . This is the place from which all the material for the great Boulder Dam will be shipped. *Would not advise anyone coming here yet.* The town is full of real estate men and men looking for both locations and work. As actual work on the dam will not start for nearly a year, there is no chance to get employment.

This is the sort of information exchange that the E. E. C. is for. There are many other similar cases, but we print the above letters for the benefit of any other comrades who may wish to know the chances of getting work on the Boulder project.

It is not often, however, that question and answer click together as nicely as in the above case. So, in order to facilitate matters,

we are organizing a "headquarters battalion" composed of E. E. C. men who have some special fund of knowledge which they are willing to place at the disposal of fellow adventurers. When some hombre pops up with a query, we'll have the name and address of an Hq. Bat. man of the E. E. C. who can answer it—and the thing's done!

Now, all you adventurers and footloose folks who have wandered the world, and know some of its strange corners, and are willing to answer a comrade's query from time to time, write in to the E. E. C. secretary and state in what field you are an authority. Your name will be put on the Hq. roster, and when your help is needed you'll be called on. We need men who know the outlands, North, West, East and South—miners, cattlemen, soldiers, gunsmiths, historians, explorers, seamen—in short, men who can cover any question likely to be asked. If you can cover a number of subjects, why, so much the better.

We already have some names for the Hq. Bat.—let's have a lot more—*pronto!*

DIAMONDS ON THE RIO NEGRO

MORE than a year ago Ezra Peterson, an Englishman, left Manaos, Brazil, which is at the mouth of the Rio Negro River, and went with a close friend at the head of an expedition up the Rio Negro after rubber. A short while ago Peterson

came down from the jungles of the upper river—alone, a dozen wounds in his body and babbling with fever. When Peterson was able to talk coherently, he told a fanciful tale of adventure and death and native treachery on the upper reaches of the Negro.

They went after rubber; and although they found no rubber, they discovered something infinitely more precious. The expedition traversed almost the entire length of the black river before coming to rest in the jungles at the upper headwaters, almost on the boundary of Colombia. While camped there one day one of the natives found in the gravel of some shallow water a small diamond. Rubber was forgotten.

No more of the stones were found there, however; Peterson changed to deeper water around a bend in the river. A long pole was driven down into the river bed, twenty feet below. Peterson and his friend, one Hawkins, remained in a dugout tied to the pole, and a native dived to the bottom with a canvas bag, which he filled with loose gravel and climbed back up the pole. The operation was repeated till the boat was filled, when it was emptied on the bank. Evidence of other diamonds were found.

All through the dry season Peterson kept the native helpers at work taking gravel from the river bed. When the rainy

season came, and the river got too high to work, the men stopped and washed over the huge pile of gravel that had been collected. And according to Peterson, although only a few stones were found, they amounted to a small fortune. But, as the dry season approached, the natives became rebellious and sullen.

This continued for some weeks. Then one day there was open mutiny in camp, and the natives seized the river crafts and went down the river. But two days later they returned through the jungle, after hiding the boats, and attacked the camp. The camp was on a high bluff overhanging the Rio Negro. When the white men refused to surrender the diamonds the fight raged warmer. Peterson was wounded three times by bullets and Hawkins once.

The battle lasted till far into the night. The ammunition of Peterson and Hawkins gave out and, rather than be captured, they plunged fifty feet over the cliff edge to the waters of the Rio Negro. Hawkins was killed or drowned in the plunge. Peterson escaped into the jungle, where he wandered for days. Finally he reached the river again; he fashioned a raft and, stricken with fever from his unhealed wounds, floated down the river to a village.

According to Peterson, the diamonds which had been placed in his clothing were lost in his plunge over the cliff. He brought from the jungles neither rubber nor precious stones.

—B. W. Gardner

GIANT MYSTERY CAVE

HERE is the story of recent explorations in the great canyon of the Rio Grande, and of what those explorations brought to light. Any of you hombres want to go down and take a look-see into that cave? Try and get in! Once a man did that, he would certainly be a full-fledged adventurer—with a vengeance.

Santa Helena Canyon in the Big Bend District of Texas through which the Rio Grande River flows at last has been explored for the first time by the white men. Lieut. Commander C. S. Young, U. S Naval Reserve, and three hardy companions recently completed the first successful trip ever made through his twenty-mile gorge and returned with a wealth of data.

Commander Young and his party brought back the first close-up photographs of a giant cave with a mouth 200 feet wide about 800 feet from the top of a solid rock wall estimated to be 2,500 feet high. The ancient Indian tribes of Texas have handed down many traditions about this cave. When the first Spaniards came to Texas 200 years ago, a secret entrance to this cave existed and much Spanish gold is stored in its vast bosom, according to tradition. It is located near the old Chihuahua Trail, for nearly a century the only line of communication between the United States and Northern Mexico.

According to scientific calculations made by Commander Young and his party, Santa Helena Canyon is nearly 1,000 feet deeper in places than the famed Royal Gorge in Colorado. Back through the centuries the Rio Grande River has cut a trail exceeding 2,900 feet in depth through the solid limestone, creating immense perpendicular walls through which the water whirls and rushes on its long tortuous way to the Gulf of Mexico.

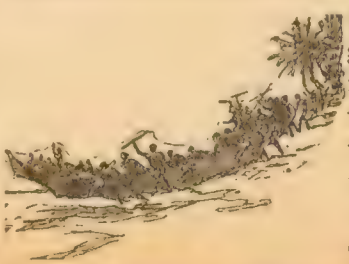
The trip was made in a boat especially built for the purpose. It was all steel, equipped with air tanks and an outboard motor. Great boulders, some as large as modern office buildings, a continuous line of rapids, and now and then a sizable fall make the trip hazardous to the last degree. Within the last year a party of four men perished in attempting the trip. Young and his party found the wreckage of their craft.

The United States Geological Survey sent two explorers, Vaughan and Hill, into the region several years ago and made a partial survey of the canyon. The present survey was made for a power company to locate probable damsites.

The canyon is reached only after a 130-mile trip by pack train from Marathon, Texas. Much of this region still remains virtually unexplored. Mariscal Canyon and Boquillas Canyon, said to equal Santa Helena in grandeur and dangers still remain to be conquered and mapped.—*Ruel McDaniel.*

THE CANNIBALS OF THE SOLOMONS

THE Solomon Islanders not long ago came into considerable public notice—in October, 1927, to be exact—through a massacre of two whites and twelve natives, the fear of a general uprising against the white settlers, and the rushing of an Australian cruiser to the Group. Among a population of 188,000



natives, there are only 700 white people in the islands, and all the main European settlements at the time of the outbreak were promptly placed in a state of defence, barbed wire and other war-material being shipped thither.

The actual scene of the murders was Malaita, one of the islands which form a British Protectorate. All the various groups of islanders are perpetually at war with one another, but Malaita, in particular, to quote an account at the time, "has long been recognized as the stronghold of the primitive savages of the South Seas." The inhabitants are still cannibals, and belong to the same race as the Australian negroes or "blacks." Missionaries have found it impossible to civilize them, as they fiercely resist all attempts to do so. They are a strong, vigorous race, for a weakly infant amongst them is not allowed to live, but is promptly put to death.

Head-hunting, formerly prevalent throughout the entire group, occasionally still breaks out in Malaita and New Georgia, another island, owing to the ineradicable belief that "possession of an enemy's head is the hall-mark of a warrior." A man's standing among his fellows, in fact, is estimated by the number of heads he possesses. Until quite recent years these islands were a great resort of the "blackbirder," or unscrupulous "recruiter" of slaves for plantation work in Brazil and elsewhere, the natives being kidnapped and sold at the rate of twenty-five dollars each.—*John G. Rowe.*

THE LETTER TRAIL

HERE'S a word from Mart Higgins—and incidentally it proves that the E. E. C. is on the job:

Dear Secretary:

In a letter of mine recently published in FRONTIER STORIES I asked for dope on the Walch pistol, and also about the disposition made of Wild Bill Hikok's pistols. Mr. George Gillender, 1457 Fullum Street, Montreal, Canada, answered both questions, for which I thank him. I write this to let you know that the E. E. C. is working splendidly.

Sincerely,
Mart F. Higgins.

Can any of the crowd give Pilot Marshall some dope on the Central America fruit country? Here's his letter:

Dear Secretary:

Please enter my name as a member of your E. E. C. I like the idea of a club of this kind very much, and I would particularly like to hear from some of the boys that have been down in the fruit country of Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala, as I am planning on going down there soon.

Wishing the Club the very best of success, which it will have if we all pull hard enough.

R. H. Marshall
Chief Test Pilot
General Air Service,
Duncan, Okla.

Here's a comrade who has made the most of his time when it comes to going places and doing things:

Dear Secretary:

Please register me as a member of the Ends-of-the-Earth Club. I've traveled around some, though I'm only twenty-one years old. Passed twenty months in the American Legation guard in Peking during the last Chinese mix-up, and I sure get a kick out of your Oriental stories, and also those of the tropics!

Private Arthur A. Heckman
Naval Prison Detachment
Mare Island
Vallejo, Calif.

And speaking of China, here's a tremendously interesting letter from one of our comrades who was there at an earlier date—in the Boxer Rebellion.

Dear Salty Bill:

Your letter informing that I was one of the prize winners in your contest arrived. Thanks for the check, Bill. And for your friendly letter also, for I consider it part of the reward.

I was inclined to feel a little cocky over my winning until I noted the addresses of the other prize winners those of some on the honor roll, then I realized I'd won by just a snort. But I can take pride in the fact that I was in darned good, speedy company.

Your tribute to Captain Riley was fine and thoughtful. Incidentally it reminded of something else in regard to China—the China of Boxer days. Last April while rambling around K. C., I ran into Johnny P——, a 9th, Infantry veteran of the Boxer Rebellion. After the city had been taken Johnny was detailed as provost-sergeant under Captain Browning of the British army who was provost-marshal. The old hellion was snooping around one night alone and it was just his luck to run into a gang of eight Boxers, disguised as coolies, looting. He downed a couple of them, but was pretty badly chopped up himself before aid in the guise of a Frog corporal and

three Cossack members of the provost guard reached the scene. Frenchy and the three Steppes horsemen knocked off the rest of the gang.

Although Johnny didn't so state, I believe he is now employed in some branch of the Government service—immigration or such. Anyway, he was stopping at the Baltimore, so we eased up to his quarters for a chin-chin. Digging into a battered bag, the old warrier produced from it a quart of pre-war Old Crow and the gab-fest was on. (No Bill, he didn't say where he got it.)

We fought her over again from the debarkation off Taku Bar to the walls of Peking. During the argument Johnny had recourse to the bag again; this time to dig up evidence to support his contention in the difference of opinion engendered by Old Crow. He sure produced it too. Military photos taken in and about Peking; some thirty 4x5 unmounted Kodak prints still in a good state of preservation. He has given to each a title and here's a few of them:

1.—The Roundup of the Lepers. This task was undertaken by the Japs. More than seven hundred were corraled in the city.

2.—The Execution. Seven or eight headless bodies scattered about the dusty street, and as many heads minus bodies here, there and yonder—as if carelessly kicked aside out of the sword-wielder's way. On one side of the block stands the official executioner—a gigantic, repulsive brute as broad as tall—grasping with both ham-like hands his huge, cleaver-like sword; at his feet grovels the next hapless victim, hands tied behind back, chin on block, while on other side of the block stands the executioner's assistant pulling on the victim's queue in order to tauten neck for blow. Savagery at its worst.

3.—The Shrinking Death. Another refined Oriental substitute for the "hot-seat." Pierce said if he remembered rightly this was snapped at the north entrance to the Walled City. It is the punishment usually meted out to captured bandit leaders. The criminal is jammed into a semi-spherical basket made of strap-iron, the lid fastened and locked, and then the basket is hauled up and suspended from the top of a davit-shaped boom overhanging a city entrance; its occupant left to die of thirst, starvation, and exposure. In the meantime of dying; his moans of pain, piteous appeals for mercy and the like, serve as a warning to other evil-doers passing through the entrance. Sometimes the condemned is a trifle large for the basket. That's his hard luck. They jam him in and fasten the lid, much in the same way we would close and fasten the lid of an overstuffed trunk.

4.—One you can look at without shuddering: The Ninth Infantry Minstrel Troupe. Theatrical talent abounding, the organization was formed to entertain and amuse the legations folk, especially the children, who had been beleaguered so long. Imagine a semi-circle seating thirty black-face artists costumed in mandarin court robes of the richest embroidered silks and satins; complete from skull-cap button to silver-and-gold brocaded mules; and you envision the minstrels in their première. And where do you think they staged their performance? You would never guess so I'll squawk. In the peacock-gorgeous throne-and-audience chamber of the Chinese Imperial Palace! Bizarre? Hell no, just superbly beautiful. Sacrilegious? Perhaps, but I'll bet old Confucius himself would have applauded if he could have heard those boys, inspired by the splendor of their setting render their rollicking, old plantation melodies, crooning mammy lullabies, and divinely tuneful negro spirituals.

Amigo, I could rattle along all night about China, but I know you'll be bored stiff when you read this far, so I'll say good luck to you and FRONTIER, and—thanks again.

Cordially yours,
William M. Robinson
Box 74, Quincy, Illinois

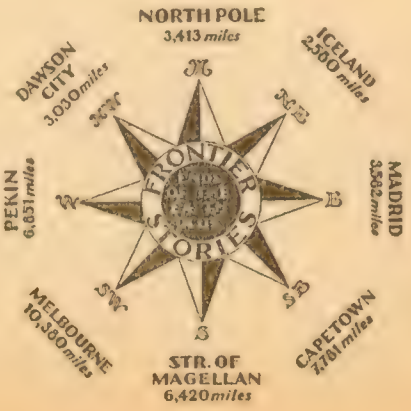
Just a final word this time from an hombre who likes the E. E. C. membership card.

Dear Secretary:

I received your card and you sure have the right emblem for the club. The first thing I look at when I pick up FRONTIER STORIES is the E. E. C. The February issue sure went over big—let's have some more French Foreign Legion stories; they sure are good.

I hope you get plenty more members!

Martin Goll
Camden, N. J.



THE SPANISH FOREIGN LEGION

WHEN we presented Lee Robinson's fine story of the Spanish Legion, "Forged Steel," to FRONTIER readers a few issues back, there were a number of letters came in, not only praising the story, and asking for more like it, but also requesting more information about this tremendously interesting fighting organization. So in the present issue we are giving you another knockout yarn of the same kind—"Wings in the Spanish Legion," and Lee Robinson has sent us the following information concerning the regiment featured in his thrilling stories:

The Spanish Foreign Legion is just over eight years old, its First Battalion having been organized late in 1920 by Lieutenant-Colonel Millan Astray, its present head. Each of its battalions consists of approximately 1,000 men, and is composed of three rifle companies and one machine gun company.

The first *legionario* killed in action was on Jan. 7, 1921. Though the organization suffered other casualties in outpost and convoying operations, it received its baptism in formal battle on June 27, 1921, at which time it was three battalions strong. By the end of 1921, the Sixth Battalion was being organized at the Legion's training camp outside of Ceuta, and the entire organization's battle losses had ascended to a total of 236 killed and 874 wounded.

I haven't any exact later statistics, but, considering its elastic battalion organization, it must have numbered several more battalions during the desperate campaigns of 1925-6, when the strength of the Spanish Army in Morocco was around 160,000 men. I do know it distinguished itself. Even in the disastrous days of 1921, when almost everything Spanish was tumbling, the infant Legion faced Abdel-Krim's warriors with a spirit worthy of its French prototype.

—*Lee Robinson.*

"THE FIGHTIN'EST MAGAZINE"

An enthusiastic FRONTIER STORIES reader dropped us a line the other day, and said, "You boys are certainly turning out the fightin'est magazine ever I laid eyes on." And he was right, for FRONTIER *is* a "fightin'" magazine. It deals with men who are fighters, men who don't "lie down and get walked on," and its scope is adventure on the world's far-flung frontiers—adventure and action.

And where did a man ever find splendid adventure and thrilling action that did not involve the primary element of conflict? Man against man, man against the wilderness, man against Fate—FRONTIER is a fightin' magazine for fightin' folks! Take some features, for instance, all of which will be in your next issue of FRONTIER STORIES.

Full of color and drama is J. Allan Dunn's novel, "Guarded Gold"—a thrilling tale of a fighting Yankee, a beautiful Spanish girl, a Central American revolution, and

a mysterious, threat-guarded treasure, lost for centuries, that looms large in the plot of this fascinating feature yarn.

One of the world's greatest fighting organizations is the French Foreign Legion, and a master hand at portraying its fierceness in battle is Bob Du Soe, who will contribute a smashing novelette, "The Dead Fight Hard," to the next issue.

An unusual tale of hard-hitting dreadnaughts—and hard-hitting men—is John Webb's "Little Private War." It's a bully yarn of what happened to two crack American naval gunners in the days of '17. Next time.

There will be, too, another of those rare and exotic stories by Edwin Glenn Huddleston, whose "The Sun God's Eyes" you read in this issue.

The authors of "Kultus Jim," also in the next issue, Elliott W. Michener and Jack Laird, will be represented by "Pirates' Cache," a thrilling tale of the British Columbia coast.

And of course there will be a host of other fighting features of the kind especially favored by the gang of this he-man's magazine.

SALTY BILL'S PRIZE CONTEST

WELL, hombres, as I told you last issue this is the final set of prizes to be awarded in the contest. When I gets through passin' out the checks this time—contest, she's done finished. And I consider it a right fine finish, too. Seven sets of prizes totaling nearly $400.00, have been awarded to FRONTIER readers, and everybody that took part has at least had some sport of one kind or another. So, in putting up the corral bars on this particular contest, I just want to thank all you folks—maybe I ought to say all you friends of mine—for taking part in my game and helping it to go across so splendidly. In the near future I may get some other game or contest rigged up—and we'll all get together again. Meantime, I'm goin' to be right here in the old TRADIN' POST, and I hope a lot of you folks will drop in for a pow-wow occasionally. How 'bout it?

Now for the prizes. All three winners this time are hombres who have scored before. Their answers group so closely on the bull's eye that it's hard to tell who was first, second, or third. But here's the way I figured it out: First prize of $25 to Paul W. Moneymaker, of Georgetown, S. C. (that hombre knows his snakes!), second prize of $15 to W. H. Haroney, of Stockton, Calif., and third prize of $10 to William M. Robinson, of Quincy, Ill.

The big topic this time concerned snakebites, an' how to treat 'em. Opinion was presented as follows.

In this day of cheap and effective snakebite kits, everyone in "snake country" ought to have one, as stressed by the hombre who wins first prize. He says:

Boy, you've opened an interesting subject. I'm going to discuss snakes and bite treatment—if you get tired before it's finished, get the wastebasket. First, as to the treatment I would use—I always carry a kit made by the Antivenin Institute of America and sold by H. K. Mulford Company, both of Philadelphia. It requires about as much room as a pocket knife and consists of a solution and hypodermic needle. Simply inject the solution into the fang punctures and both above and below, remain perfectly quiet and no ill effects will be felt.

Another good kit is sold by Max Wocher & Son of Cincinnati at $3.00 a dozen. This requires connecting the fang punctures with a knife slit and applying the "pills"—wet them first with saliva if no water is available.

The U. S. Forest Service and Geological Survey require field parties to carry one of the above two kits. I prefer the first because it is painless. Both are sure treatments.

Here are two crude methods that are successful if you should be foolish enough to be caught without a kit.

1.—Apply a tourniquet between the bite and the heart, if the wound is in a place that makes it possible, be sure to release it for a moment every ten minutes or so, to prevent gangrene; secure three live chickens, if possible, pluck the breast feathers, scrape the breast until it bleeds and hold it against the wound, which must be opened with a knife. The first chicken will soon die, and the second probably will. If the second does not die, the third is unnecessary.

2.—Use chewed tobacco instead of the chickens. This is better if you are alone, with no farms handy.

All four of the above treatments are successful against the rattler, copperhead, and moccasin, but in any case you should get to a doctor as quickly as possible, for the flesh around a poisoned snakebite is particularly susceptible to blood-poisoning.

In short, always carry a snakebite kit—they are inexpensive, convenient to carry, and above all, are effective.

Remain quiet—a man in perfect health will probably recover without treatment if he does so. In any case it is a part of the cure. Don't lose your head and go tearing around in a frenzy.

Apply a tourniquet—but be sure to release it every ten minutes to prevent gangrene.

Avoid alcohol, especially in large quantities. Use black coffee.

Be sure to correctly identify the snake—rattler, copperhead, and moccasin may be treated the same, *but* if it is a harlequin or coral different treatment is necessary.

A word about snakes. There are nineteen varieties of poisonous snakes in the U. S., comprising five families.

1. The rattler (*Crotalus* family) of 13 varieties, one of which—the Eastern diamondback—growing to nine feet, is the largest snake in the U. S.

2. Massasauga and pigmy rattlers (*Sistrurus* family) two distinct types of rattlers.

3. The copperhead. Most of us have a peculiar loathing for a certain snake; with me it is the copperhead. He is a sneaking, dangerous, treacherous devil. Usually you know he is near after he has bitten you. The mountaineers of the southern Appalachians from Pennsylvania to Georgia, who are familiar with him and the rattler, loathe the copperhead. A traitor or low-down person is, in mountain slang, a copperhead.

4. The cotton-mouth moccasin (*Ancistrodon* family). A cousin of the copperhead.

5. The *Coral* and *Harlequin* (*Micrurus* family).

The last two are very rare, being found only in the South.

Treatment against the other three does not apply to them. If bitten by either a coral or a herlequin, apply a tourniquet immediately, release it every ten minutes, REMAIN QUIET, drink as much black coffee as possible and get a doctor quickly.

Very sincerely yours,
Paul W. Moneymaker.
Georgetown, S. C.

P. S. Let us hear from someone who knows the "road runner" and king snake, enemies of the poisonous snakes. I've had mountaineers tell me some "whoppers" about the king snake's fights with copperheads and rattlers, but I've never read anything written by authorities.

Comrade Robinson tells of an experience of his own:

First-aid treatment for venomous snakebites, be immediate. Prompt action is everything. First apply tourniquet six or eight inches above fang punctures; for example, if bitten on hand or wrist apply just below elbow. A narrow strap or rolled handkerchief will serve. Then incise punctures, apply lips to wound and try to *suck white!* Remember it's your bite! Incision should be made with a keen, clean blade—and in this respect a new safety razor blade is admirable. Make incision so that it is as deep as and with line of passing through and bisecting fang punctures. Free bleeding and lots of suction is what we want. Massage and knead flesh between tourniquet and wound to further induce flow. Snake venom is a coagulant. Loosen tourniquet, then immediately readjust at intervals of ten or fifteen minutes. It is necessary to restore circulation occasionally to prevent primary gangrene from setting in. If alone and remote from surgical aid you'll probably be camp-outfitted. In that case make a pot of strong coffee and drink lots of it. Snake venom has a tendency to stupefy. You'll need a stimulant, and coffee is it. Now hope for the best.

Let's test the efficacy of all this: July 5, 1909, my chief sent me to a point eighteen miles southeast of Arlington, Arizona, and one mile distant from the Gila River to locate a Geodetic Survey correction line marker. I found the monument without trouble, flagged it, then moved over to the river to camp and await the rest of the crew as per orders. Stripping the gear from old Benny and the pack-horse, I hobbled and slapped them away to the river, then went about the pressing business of preparing chuck. Turning from my campfire to the pack-outfit, I reached under the peak of the *aparejos* to lift them from the ground, and smack! I got it on the back of the right hand. A sidewinder had slid under the gear while I was gathering wood. I stared stupidly at the pallid slimy devil while it wiggled away, then remembered my training and went into action. I've told you what I'd do for a rattler's bite, but I'm not going to tell you anything that happened during the next six hours following the treatment. The truth is I went into a blue funk and I'm ashamed of it. When the gang drilled in about ten that night they found me huddled on my saddle before a dying campfire. The chief followed them in his buckboard and seeing the gang crowding about me yelled, "What's up?" Someone replied, "A rattler got Bill." The old man ordered, "Put him in here," turned, poured the leather into his team, and lit out hell-bent for the Gila Bend Indian Reservation Agency ten miles away. That good old jigger sure knew how to act in an emergency. That's the reason he was the chief.

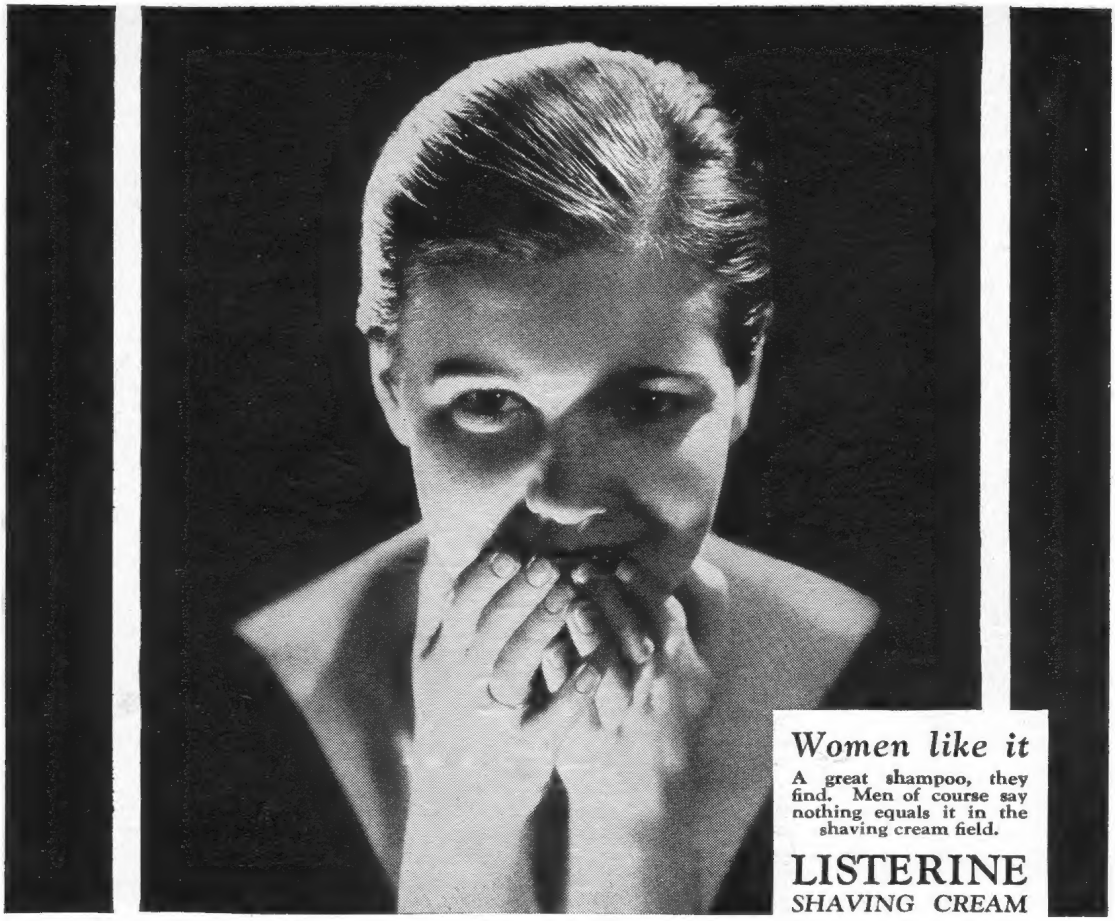
At the Agency, Doc Edgar took charge, and pronounced me out of danger, but I was sure a sick hombre for a few days.

Very truly yours,
William M. Robinson.
Quincy, Illinois.

Here is the customary honor roll of the folks who ranked next after the winners of money prizes. Each person to make the honor roll receives an original pen-and-ink drawing that has been used to illustrate the magazine.

HONOR ROLL

G. B. PUGH	Yerington, Nev.
DAVE YOUNG	Lexington, Ky.
DOROTHY E. WARD	Ridgetown, Ont., Can.
F. BERNARD BAILEY	Hempstead, N. Y.
W. NICOLSON	Winnipeg, Can.
DANIEL S. GAGE	Fulton, Mo.
DAVID L. WARD	Monterey, Cal.
LES ROSE	Ogden, Utah
CARTWRIGHT SPENCER	Mitchel Field, L. I., N. Y.
JACK HAMPTON	Princess Anne, Md.



Keeping hair free from Dandruff

THIS matter of keeping hair free from dandruff is neither the complicated nor expensive one that most women consider it. Usually the trick can be done by regular shampooing and the systematic use of Listerine, the safe and soothing antiseptic.

At the first sign of dandruff, you simply douse Listerine on the scalp full strength, and with the fingers, massage the scalp vigorously forward and backward, then up and down. Keep it up systematically.

In a surprisingly short time you will be delighted with results. We have hundreds of unsolicited letters testifying to the success of Listerine in checking dandruff.

You can understand Listerine's success when you realize that dandruff is a germ disease, and that full strength Listerine, while safe in action and healing in effect, possesses at the same time, great germicidal power.

Even such stubborn germs as the B. Typhosus (typhoid) and M. Aureus (pus) are destroyed by it in 15 seconds—200,000,000 of them in each test. A strong statement this—and we could not make it unless we were prepared to prove it to the satisfaction of both the U. S. Government and the medical profession.

Remember that dandruff yields to antiseptic treatment and massage, and use Listerine regularly. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

LISTERINE

THE SAFE AND SOOTHING ANTISEPTIC

kills 200,000,000 germs in 15 seconds

"Don't be selfish"

CAMELS

Pleasure for all

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